

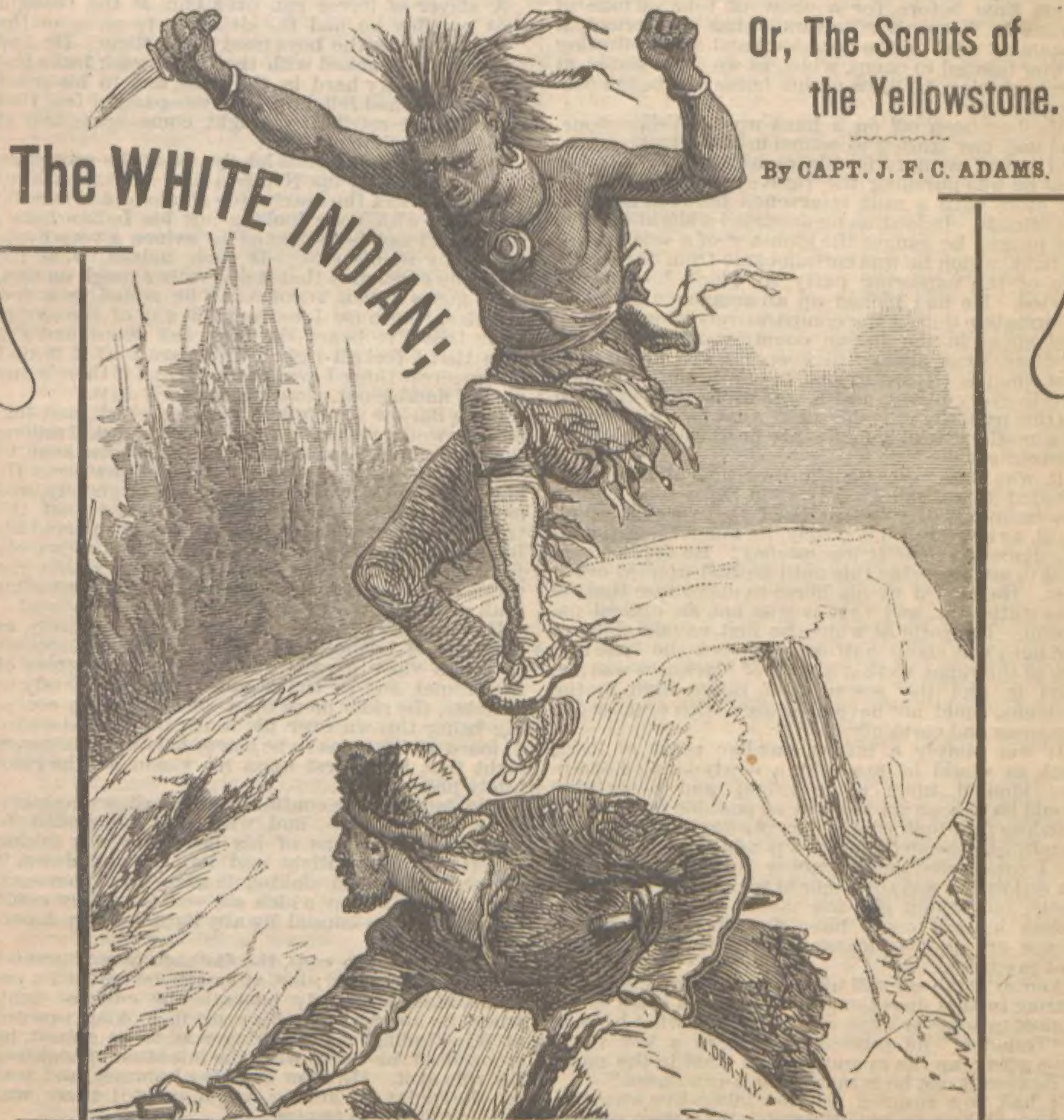
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DUKE BARLOW'S SURPRISE.

The White Indian;

OR,

The Scouts of the Yellowstone.

BY CAPTAIN J. F. C. ADAMS,

AUTHOR OF "OREGON SOL," "GLASS-EYE," "NED HAZEL," "NICK WHIFFLES'S PET," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A PERPLEXED EXPLORER.

DUKE BARLOW reined up his horse and rubbed his eyes, for never was he more puzzled in all his life. It beat all his former experiences hollow, and raised such an amount of distrust in his own mind that he was not only perplexed but was uncomfortable and uneasy.

He was mounted upon a fine Indian pony, which he had persuaded a Sioux chieftain to trade him, some time before, for a chew of tobacco (one of Smith & Wesson's revolvers being the principal argument used on the occasion,) and was returning rather belated to camp, when, as we have stated at the beginning, he drew up his horse and began rubbing his eyes.

He had been off on a hunt up the Yellowstone, and had not started to return until dark; but Duke had a good memory for places, and he was satisfied that he was pursuing the right course, and that little more than a mile intervened between him and his friends. Indeed, as he ascended a slight knoll in the prairie, he caught the glimmer of a small point of light, which he was certain came from the camp-fire of the exploring party to which he was attached. He had picked up an amazing amount of information during the comparatively short time he had spent in the Indian country, and one of the "points" was always to keep his wits about him, and when he paused to look in one direction, to look also in every other; and it was while thus engaged on this partially moonlit night, that he caught sight of something which made his head fairly reel with amazement.

It was due north, in the direction of a densely-wooded ridge, and at first sight Duke took it to be the camp-fire of some party of Indians or hunters, until, as he watched it closely, he made the astounding discovery *that it was moving!* He did not consent to acknowledge this until he had applied every test. He looked at his horse to make sure that he was stationary, and that it was not an optical delusion. The point at which he first caught sight of the light was about half-way between the base and top of the ridge, so that a wall of blackness was behind it, and the moon itself riding high in the heavens, could not have been seen with greater distinctness and certainty.

It was simply a bright, star-like point of light, such as would be made by a newly-kindled camp-fire—kindled upon some ridge; and everything would have been as natural as possible but for the puzzling fact that it was slowly swaying from right to left, like the swinging of a pendulum.

"I guess some music-teacher is marking time for his scholars," was the thought which first suggested itself, but which did not mend matters; for no Goliath himself could have described such an immense arc as that, measuring, at the least, twenty feet in extent.

And so Duke sat still upon the back of his horse, staring in that direction, and taxing his brain to the utmost to suggest some explanation of what he saw.

"Thunder!" he suddenly added, in a low voice, "it's going up the mountain, and what in the name of Heaven it can be is more than I can guess."

It had now stopped the pendulum-like swaying, and could be seen steadily rising, like the "mount-

ing of a star," until it ascended higher than the background of blackness, and was now some distance above the ridge. Here it remained motionless for a full minute, and then suddenly dove a distance of twenty feet, where it began again the pendulum-like swaying from side to side, the amplifications, however, being much less than in the first place.

"Wonder if I'm tight?" muttered the puzzled explorer, when he had attempted every possible explanation and still had failed. "I remember many a night in the college how we boys used to come home with the hiccups, and then sit at the window and try to see but one moon. I remember how one moon seemed to have two or three around it, dodging in and out, and playing hide and seek, until we were all ready to swear that it wasn't the earth but Jupiter we were living upon; but that was the whisky in those days, and I don't see how it can be now, for I haven't taken a drop since day before yesterday, except a pint or so this morning, and about the same at noon again, and not a drop to-night (because the bottle was empty). I'm satisfied it's bad business, and I'm going to taper off. My head, I'm satisfied, is as clear as a bell, but—"

A shiver of terror ran over him at the thought that possibly he had the delirium tremens, or the "jim-jams," as the boys used to call them. He had never been attacked with them, although Duke had spread it pretty hard in the past, and in his sober moments he had felt more than one pang of fear that that terrible retribution might come upon him at some future time or other.

Could it be that in this lonely out-of-the-way place in the Far West, his Nemesis had overtaken him? Was he to meet the fearful foe all alone, and wrestle with him, with none looking but his Indian horse, who could not be expected to evince a very lively sympathy in his case? If such, indeed, were the truth, he concluded that it was rather rough on him.

"I guess I hain't got 'em," he added in a few minutes, "because I haven't felt any of the symptoms that I've heard the boys tell about, and I'm sure that I feel all right. Thunderation! if it ain't the queerest thing I ever heard of, and if there's any way of finding out what it means, I'll do it."

Duke Barlow was full of genuine pluck, and had already won a reputation for daring and skill among the Government explorers who had been sent to "interview" this portion of the Yellowstone. He had little faith in the supernatural or ghostly, and as soon as he was tolerably convinced that the trouble was not with his own nerves, he spurred his Indian pony directly toward the mysterious object, with the resolve that if it were within the range of human possibility he would find out what it all meant.

He was able to make only moderate progress, as a species of bushes, interlaced and locked together by tough vines, greatly obstructed the progress of the animal, and at times caused him frequently to stumble, the rider more than once narrowly escaping being thrown over his head; but he had sworn to learn all that was to be learned about this strange sight that had burst upon his vision, and he resolutely pressed on.

The dancing star continued its puzzling manipulations all this time, and when not compelled to watch the footsteps of his beast, he was gazing eagerly at that. Right and left, up and down, it swayed, rising and sinking in graceful movements, and with a sweep which showed that they could not possibly be caused by any light held in a person's hand.

As is often the case, the distance proved greater than he anticipated; but at length he reached a position almost directly beneath the curious light, where he almost broke his neck in looking upward at it. Finding that nothing was to be gained, he stepped off his horse with the intention of sighting his rifle at it. He drew back the hammer, and was on the point of aiming, when, presto! there was noting at which to aim.

Once more Duke rubbed his eyes, and began wondering whether he was in a land of enchantment or where nature's laws were still sovereign.

"I think I'd better go back and get the surgeon to give me something for my nerves," he added, despairingly; "it must have been that I've had a touch of the shakes. I never was served this way before, and it's a warning. I'm here all alone, with no one but Heaven to hear, and I swear by all that is sacred that with its assistance, I will never touch a drop of the stuff again unless it be in case of sickness."

Never was a man more solemnly in earnest than was Duke Barlow, when he made this vow, and by way of showing it, he drew forth the black bottle from within his coat (and from which it must be confessed he had imbibed too often), and dashed it to pieces against a stone at his feet.

"There," he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, "we will see what that amounts to. I have always had a reputation for owning a will, and I'll put it on its mettle."

As he uttered these words, he was standing something like a dozen feet from his pony, which remained as motionless, as if carved from stone, when it suddenly threw up his head with a snort of terror, looking off toward the dark ridge, as if he scented danger in that direction.

"It can't be that he's got a touch of them too," whispered the horseman, furtively glancing over his shoulder, "though he might have been a guzzler before he came into my hands—hello!"

At this juncture, he wheeled about, in the very extremity of fear, and dashed off at full speed in a direction toward the camp. Duke understood the nature of animals well enough to know that when one of them acted in this fashion, there was something tangible to cause it; and forgetful of the strange *ignis fatuus* that had brought him thither, he sunk softly down among the bushes, grasping his rifle, and with every sense on the alert.

At first he could neither see nor hear anything to explain the sudden terror of the horse, and then the chills crept over him, as a sound like the moan of a suffering human being reached his ears. He remained crouching and listening for several minutes, during which the dismal sound continued, and there, with all his senses about him, he endeavored to ascertain from whence the outcry proceeded.

It would have been amusing, had the scene been a little less serious, to have seen the young man stealthily raising his head, partly rising to his feet, while he turned his face first in one direction and then in another, determined to make sure of the central point of this terrible business.

Duke could not be deceived as to the result of this self-instituted test, for try it again and again, in whichever way he chose, and the inevitable result was the proof that the disturbing moan came not from the north, south, east, or west, but from some point over his head, up in the air! It continued for only a minute or two, when it ceased as suddenly as it began.

By this time our young friend was so knocked up, that he would have dashed away in horror from the place but for the conviction that, although this bore such a supernatural appearance, there was reason to believe that there was something more tangible close at hand. His Indian stood had shown not the least trepidation when that weird light was dancing and waving overhead, and his spasm of alarm had come before this dismal moaning, from the same direction, could have struck his ear.

As may be supposed, Duke Barlow had not neglected to use his eyes, by peering into the gloom above. The sky had darkened during the last few minutes, the faint moon being hidden by the passage of heavy clouds, so that his vision extended but a short distance—certainly not far enough to reveal anything that could help clear up the mystery.

"Sh! he did catch just the faintest, softest rustling in the world, such as is sometimes heard on a still

summer night, when a breath of air gently bows the head of grain. It might have been produced by the same cause in the present instance, but the adventurer believed it was caused by the moccasin of an Indian, stealing upon him.

The hammer of his rifle was raised, but he now quietly lowered it, and drew forth his revolver. It was a great deal handier thing to have about, when he was in for a desperate hand-to-hand scrimmage with one of the red-skins. He was on the point of advancing toward the suspicious place, when he changed his mind, and concluded it safer to remain where he was, on guard.

"That imp began the scrape," he concluded, "and let him keep it up without any advantage from me. He can't steal upon me without my knowing it, or if he can, he's welcome to all the hair he can raise."

Once again that stealthy rustle reached his ear, and still puzzled to make certain what it meant, it served to keep his senses strung to the very highest tension.

This unremitting vigilance was rewarded by discovering very speedily that there was something or some one within a dozen feet of him, and gradually approaching.

Duke glanced up at the moon and saw that a heavy cloud had almost passed over its face, so that in a few seconds more it would be clear, and his vision would be more extended. He crouched still lower, until he lay almost upon his face, but still his right hand, which held the Smith & Wesson, was free, so that, if necessary, he could sight and fire on the instant.

Lighter and lighter grew the atmosphere, until, as the gloom partially cleared away, the outlines of a human head came out faintly to view. Duke noiselessly raised his hand, and held his weapon pointed so that the pulling of the trigger would be certain to bore the skull through and through.

His fore-finger was beginning to press the trigger, when he lowered the pistol again, for there was something in the appearance of the dimly-outlined face which suggested that it might not belong to an Indian, after all. He had no desire to shoot one of his own race in a style like this, and with his eye fixed keenly upon the form, he studied it with the sharpest scrutiny possible.

"By heavens! it *is* a white man!" he gasped, the next moment, "and he is no stranger to me. I'll try his nerves a little."

Raising his weapon again, he pointed it upward and fired two chambers in the air. At the same instant, the man rolled backward out of sight, falling with a heavy thump. Certain that he could not have injured him, on account of the direction in which the pistol was pointed, Duke ran forward and bent over him. He was stretched out flat upon his face, with every appearance of being stone-dead, and our hero laughed as he understood how desperately hard he was shamming.

"What's the matter, Zadok? I don't want your scalp."

"Hilloa, Duke, is that you? I'll be durned if I didn't think it was Tecumseh, or Shacknasty Jim, or Captain Jack, so I thought I'd play 'possum and save my scalp. What made yer shoot at me?"

Duke explained how he had made no attempt to harm him, but only sought a little amusement for himself, and then wound up with the question:

"Have you seen anything of Indians to-night, in this neighborhood?"

"Not a durned Injun, and I hope I won't; but I've seen a blamed sight bigger thing than Injuns, I can tell you."

"What's that?" eagerly asked Barlow.

"Why—I don't know exactly what it was. I guess I was mistaken."

Zadok Brown had risen to his feet, and removing his hat was scratching his head, his whole manner being that of a person who was caught with his own words. He had evidently let something slip

which he was seeking to recall in his awkward fashion.

"It was the queerest dream I ever had," he added, catching at the desperate means that suddenly presented itself; "thought I see'd every thing; but then what's the use of telling a chap's dreams, when he's in such a durned country as this?"

"What took you so far away from camp at this time of night?" inquired Duke, willing to drop the matter which he had so inadvertently introduced.

"I've been out practicing with my lasso," he replied, as he stooped down and picked up a coil of rope from the ground, "and lost my way. I was trying to get back to camp when I took you for an Injin, and was trying to get up near enough to fling my rope 'round your neck, and to raise your hair before you knowed it. Lucky for you that you wasn't a red-man, for I would have nabbed you, certain."

"Come, the night is getting along, and let's make our way back to camp before they eat up everything there. Haven't you got a horse with you?"

"I had one, but he wandered off, and I don't s'pose I'll ever see him again."

"I have hope that mine has found his way into camp, and yours may have done the same," suggested Duke Barlow, as they walked along side by side.

"No, I don't think he will."

The significant tone in which these words were uttered satisfied his friend that Zadok had had a series of adventures which he was unwilling to relate. Some singular experience had befallen him, and it was not a mere wandering off upon the part of his horse that had caused them to part company. There was something back of it all which was yet to be understood, and which looked as if it would never be understood at all.

"I say, Duke, have you seen anything particular about these parts to-night?"

"What do you mean?" asked the other, suspecting, but uncertain of what he referred to.

"Dunno," was the cautious answer of the other, "but this is a strange country. Darned if I ever see'd anything like it. A feller don't know one minute what he's going to see next. It may be six-legged animals, or double-headed Injins or shooting stars, and heaven knows what all. Haven't you noticed anything of that kind?"

"How would I see them?" demanded Duke, anxious to draw out his companion. But the latter fought shy, and refused to make clear what he was referring to. The fact was that not only these two, but several others, had seen strange visions on this same night—strange enough to cause each and all to believe so strongly that they had been deceived, that all refrained from making reference to it, in each other's company.

But stranger events were speedily to follow.

CHAPTER II.

THE SIGNAL-FIRE AND THE FIGHT.

THE Mufton Exploring Expedition was sent out by our Government for the purpose of making some surveys about the Upper Yellowstone. This interesting section has been attracting increased attention for the last few years, and so many vivid reports had come in of its wonders in the way of rivers, lakes, and canyons, wild animals and natural productions, that it was only a deference to the general demand that the expedition was organized, thoroughly equipped and dispatched to that remarkable region, with orders not to return till they could bring some definite knowledge with them.

The party were efficiently prepared in every respect. Two old mountaineers were selected as guides, besides a couple of brevet hunters, who had been out once or twice. By this admirable arrangement there was little likelihood of the company being left without the indispensable adjunct of a guide at a critical juncture, for if one of the veterans was killed, they had the other to fall back upon, and

if he should go under, the two brevets remained. Captain Mufton swore that there was no danger of losing them, for they were such cowards that they could not possibly be lost until all the rest were out of the way.

The entire company numbered about a hundred all told, and were well provided with guns, ammunition and horses.

Among them were a number of expert marksmen and daring Indian-fighters, while others, answering to the former qualification, were anxious to earn the latter distinction. They had joined the expedition more for the fun of the thing than anything else. They liked the prospect of stirring adventure, and held the red-skins in less dread than they were likely to hold them after a few months' acquaintance.

Among the most popular members of the latter class was Duke Barlow, one of the most genial-hearted and best-natured of men. He had rowed in the winning boat at a college regatta, and then with a wealthy and indulgent father, who never denied him anything, he concluded to make a little tour before settling down to his profession—law.

Just at this juncture, when he was in New York to engage passage on a steamer, for the purpose of "doing" Europe, he ran against his old friend Major Mufton, who urged him to join his expedition about to start for the Upper Yellowstone. It took just five minutes to win his consent, when Duke sent his baggage forward to St. Louis, and speedily followed it himself *in propria persona*.

Another personage who joined the expedition from the same State with Duke, was Zadok Brown, a sort of peregrinating school-teacher, who secured this privilege upon the plea of acquiring more knowledge, with a view of ultimately going for one of the professorships at Cambridge, or Yale, or Princeton.

Zadok was noted for his good nature, a certain dry humor, and an extraordinary skill which he speedily acquired in handling the rifle. In several tests which were made, after the company were pretty well up in the Yellowstone, he surpassed every marksman in the company, not excepting the old hunters who acted as guides. He was extremely attenuated in frame, was capable of running with great speed, and but for the fact that he could never free himself of a curious timidity, amounting in many cases to downright cowardice, he would have become one of the very first and most reliable men in the expedition. This single defect is perhaps the greatest misfortune that can attend a man whose duties lead him among such scenes of peril as the Far West, and it was that which caused Zadok to become more of a butt for the company than any one else.

The school-teacher having acquired such skill in the use of the gun, displayed a curious taste for learning to throw the lasso, and in this accomplishment he speedily acquired an astonishing proficiency. Among such a number of men were several who had lassoed their mustangs on the Llano Estacado, and who had not forgotten the trick. With a few hints from them, Zadok speedily acquired the particular sleight-of-hand, and surprised them all by the dexterity with which he caught and brought in the runaway horses of the company. The only trouble was that at first he was jerked off his own beast, from following the waggish directions of the hunters to keep at all times one end of the lasso around his own body.

With these necessary preliminaries, we come back to the scene, wherein have occurred incidents we propose to narrate.

It was well up in the Northwest, among the wildest regions of the Upper Yellowstone, that Major Mufton established his camp, with the intention of remaining several weeks, while the different members of the party pursued the different duties to which their Government had assigned them. The hunters, or guides, were now set to work to bring

in game and food for the others, and to keep a constant lookout for the Indians, who were known to be in the vicinity in large numbers. There can be no doubt but that, had the party been less powerful and thoroughly organized they would have been cut off long before their present camp was reached, and as it was, there was no little danger; when they came to split up in several sections the risk was increased ten-fold.

On the morning succeeding the adventure given in the preceding chapter, Duke Barlow and Zadok Brown started off in company. Each seemed to feel that there was a secret in common between them, and they instinctively sought each other. Neither was able to find his horse, that had been frightened away on the previous evening, and they were obliged to borrow fresh ones of their friends. As other members of the company were constantly coming and going, and as the two were known to be quite intimate, their going off in this fashion attracted no notice whatever. Zadok was unable to contain his secret, and they had ridden but a short distance when he related what had happened to him prior to their meeting, on the night before.

It seems that he was on the other side of the ridge, and just as it was growing dark had started homeward, when he was alarmed by hearing signals in the wood, which he was satisfied were made by Indians perfecting their plans for his capture. He did not dare turn back, for the country immediately behind him was so wild and broken that he would have become entangled very speedily, and so he dismounted and began crawling forward on his hands and knees, for the purpose of reconnoitering his position, but he had not gone a dozen yards when the stamp of his horse's hoofs caused him to turn his head, just in time to see a man riding away upon his animal.

Although Zadok had his loaded rifle in hand, and could have picked off the audacious thief with the most perfect ease, yet he refrained from pulling the trigger, from a belief that there were others near at hand, who would be apt to be mad if he should kill one of them; so he lay still until the thief was out of sight, when he resumed his cautious ascent of the ridge, and was near the top, when the same sight which puzzled and alarmed Duke Barlow affected him in similar fashion. He watched and studied it closely, but did not dare approach as near as did his friend, and he came no nearer a satisfactory explanation than did he. His theory of a meteor, or shooting-star, was untenable, and he was not long in dismissing it, and in coming back to his starting-point, where he was totally unable to make it out.

"Put, Duke," said he, as they rode along together, "another idea came into my head, while I was half-awake and half-dreaming about this business, last night. I think I understand what it all meant."

"Well, what is it?" inquired his companion.

"I ain't going to say what it is just at present; but we'll wait awhile, and see how near I hit the mark."

Duke had also a theory of his own, and the two agreed to keep them back for the present until they had been somewhat tested, while they worked together and did what they could toward solving the mystery, that was becoming too great to bear with any thing like equanimity.

The ridge where the wonderful sights and sounds of the previous evening had been seen and heard, was some three or four miles distant from the site of the camp selected by Major Muffon, and so far as could be judged, had been visited by no member of the party excepting these two, who were returning to make a more thorough examination. There was nothing in the appearance of the wooded hill to attract attention or awaken interest, and it was without any premeditation on the part of either that Zadok and Duke had bent their footsteps in that direction in the first place.

Beyond this ridge were the lakes and waterfalls and canyons and picturesque scenery, toward which all who were at liberty turned their faces, while the two individuals mentioned determined upon a joint attempt to fathom the most inexplicable mystery of their lives.

"I believe we are watched," said Duke, when they had ridden some distance. "There is some secret in that ridge which is guarded with the strictest jealousy, and we have to use all the caution we can, or instead of gratifying our curiosity, we shall get into some trouble that will wind up our career forever."

"How would it do to go back and go around?" asked Zadok. "We can then approach the ridge from an opposite direction; but there's one difficulty about that," he added, thoughtfully, "which won't make it work very well."

"What's that?"

"There's such a wild, broken country beyond that it will take us a week to make the detour, and by that time perhaps it would be too late to find out what we want to."

"And even then we could be seen just as well from that direction as this, so we will ride on up the valley until we are a mile beyond the point we want to strike, and by that time whoever have their eyes upon us will conclude that we're going to call somewhere else."

This plan was carried out, the two riding the distance mentioned, and striving all the time to look as innocent and unsuspecting as a couple of lambs. When they had penetrated into some cover, where they felt tolerably secure from observation, they dismounted and looked carefully down the valley, over which they had just ridden.

"By George!" exclaimed Duke Barlow, the next minute, "there's some deviltry afoot! Don't you see that?" he added, pointing excitedly toward the ridge. "Look! right on the very top."

"I don't see any thing," replied Zadok, after he had spent several minutes in striving to find out what it meant. "What the deuce do you mean?"

"Don't you see that smoke going up through the trees?"

"Yes; and what is there so wonderful about that, that you need make such a fuss?"

Before replying, Barlow drew a pocket-glass from his pocket, and leveling it toward the point mentioned, spent several minutes in a most attentive scrutiny.

"There isn't any use in wasting time," said he, as he handed the implement to his friend, "by telling you to try and find out for yourself. In the first place, there is something suspicious in that camp-fire burning upon the top of the hill, and then what makes it more curious than all is that instead of being upon the ground, it *has been kindled in the top of a tree!*"

"How can you tell that?" asked Brown, with an expression of incredulity; "that is drawing things a little too fine."

"I didn't see it until I had looked through the glass, but it was the waving appearance of that smoke which attracted my attention at first. If you had studied Indian signs, with as much success as you have handling the lasso and rifle, you would have known at once that that was no camp-fire, but an Indian signal. I was looking at it very closely through the glass, when I caught a red flash through the leaves, near the top, which proved that the blaze was there instead of—"

"You're right," exclaimed Zadok, with some excitement, as he still stood with the glass to his eye. "I saw it just now. I s'pose the fire is started there so that the smoke can be seen more distinctly."

"That's it; and now, if you will turn the glass off to the right toward that mountain some miles away, you will see another column of smoke. It looks very faint so far off, and I wouldn't have seen it at all, if I hadn't felt sure there was something of the kind, and by good luck I happened to turn my eye to the

very spot. Well, any fool can put the two together, and understand that these are two Indian parties who are signaling to each other, and the only thing that they would be likely to signal about is our company. So there is *that* little mystery settled up. Those hunters have got to keep their eyes skinned, or some of these days we shall have Fort Phil Kearney over again. Come ahead, Zadok, I think we can pick our way along without our being seen.

Zadok just then looked very much as if he would like to mount his horse and ride back to camp, so as to be there and die with the others; but he said nothing, and followed on after his friend, very willing that he should play the guide at this stage of the business.

As the upper portion of the ridge was entirely covered with wood, Duke gradually approached the top while still working his way toward the point that was enveloped in so much mystery. All this time he kept a watch upon the signal-fires, or rather smoke, which gradually grew fainter and more indistinct, until the one in the distance faded from view altogether. No Indians, as yet, were seen, although several of their own party were detected, as they pursued their explorations in different directions.

Finally Duke halted at a point which he declared was within two or three hundred yards of the spot they were seeking.

"And we must be careful now," he said, in a whisper, as they crouched in the rocks; "a misstep here will upset everything."

"Won't it be very apt to upset *us*, too?" asked Zadok, in a shivering whisper.

"Shouldn't wonder," replied his friend, "but then we must take our chance. From this point we shall have to creep forward on our hands and knees."

"If it's all the same to you, Duke, I don't feel very well to-day. I feel like an attack of the cholera morbus, and I'll sit down here and wait till it passes over, while you go ahead and look around. Oh, dear! oh—my—" groaned Brown, pressing his hands to his stomach, and leaning forward until he was almost double.

"All right," replied Barlow, who intended to make a similar proposition, as he believed he could do the impending work much better alone; "only don't get to groaning too loud or you may bring a party down upon you."

Zadok ceased on the instant, while Duke pressed forward upon his delicate business, fully conscious that he was assuming no little risk. Indeed, had it not been so early in the day, he would have waited until nightfall before making the attempt; but that was too long a time to wait, with patience; and stealing out from behind the rock, he moved carefully along the crest of the ridge, looking right and left and in every direction, while at every foot or two he paused to listen.

Nothing was seen or heard, and fancying that he himself was proceeding with the utmost stillness, he had traversed about half the distance intervening between his companion and his destination, when an interruption of the most alarming kind took place.

This was nothing less than a rifle shot, and the whiz of the bullet, as it grazed his forehead, left no doubt of the target at which the foe had aimed. Duke, at this moment, was in a crouching position, with his face almost on a level with his knees, and he fell at once upon his hands, partly stunned and confused by the hair-breadth escape from the bullet; but he did not remain long in that position, when he heard the tramp of his enemy close upon him. Leaping with great quickness upon one knee, he drew his rifle to his shoulder, and sighting, with the tall, muscular Indian scarcely a dozen feet distant, pulled the trigger.

But, as bad luck would have it, the lock was injured in some way, so that the hammer descended only half-way, the weapon remaining unchangeably at "half-cock." The white man had no time to look into the cause of this calamity, when,

dropping the weapon, he drew forth his revolver, and raised that almost in the face of the savage, who had come to a halt upon hearing the useless click of the lock, and when he caught sight of the little six-shooter, he knew well enough what it meant.

He uttered one involuntary exclamation, as if he already felt the sting of the leaden pills in his face, and then shot back and ducked his head in such a way that he went out of sight behind the broad, flat rock, over which Duke was stealing at the moment he was brought to a standstill in this summary manner. As this left him at the mercy of his antagonist, he lost no time in scrambling down upon the opposite side, so that the two enemies were virtually placed in a hide-and-seek attitude.

This lasted scarcely a minute, when the red-skin (who was painted and dressed like a Sioux) made one tremendous bound which carried him clean over the rock, and caused him to land with crushing weight upon the head and shoulders of the astounded Duke Barlow. It was a daring act, and one that is rare in a red-skin, who is the last man in the world to precipitate an attack, where there is anything like an equal advantage on the part of both. It gave him immense vantage-ground, too, for his crouching white antagonist had no thought of such a thing until he felt him come down like an avalanche upon his shoulders.

This misfortune resulting from this was that his only remaining fire-arm was knocked several feet from his hand while he rolled backward, with the brawny red-skin on top of him. Duke was naturally a powerful and active man, skillful in wrestling and leaping as well as throwing, and when he felt himself borne backward, with a man much heavier than he upon his chest, he quickly "turned" him, and then made an attempt to free himself from his embrace by leaping backward; but the red-skin held him fast by sheer strength alone.

CHAPTER III.

ZADOK'S GREAT SOMERSET.

DUKE BARLOW had closed in with many strong men in his time, and had never yet met one whom he could not subdue and bring under. No doubt that he had retrograded in strength and activity during the last year or two, but he was never more certain of any thing in the world than he was that he had gripped the toughest customer of his life.

Finding that he was resolved upon holding him fast, so as to prevent his recovering his pistol, Duke struck the Indian a powerful blow in the face, which broke the lock, and permitted him to leap to his feet. The red-skin was scarcely behind him, and bounding upright, he jerked out his knife and advanced boldly upon him. Our hero felt that there was little show for him, unless he could regain his pistol, and, keeping his eye fixed upon his antagonist, he began walking backward in the direction where he knew it lay. This, it would seem, was a very simple proceeding, involving no difficulty, at all; but, somehow or other, Duke was in bad luck to-day, for he had passed about half the intervening distance, when he struck his heel against a stone, and, as he was walking quite rapidly, he fell flat upon his back.

With uplifted knife, and a grunt of exultation, the red-skin made a dash at him, intending to end the encounter, with one sweeping blow; but at this juncture, there was a whirling rush, a long serpent seemed to spin through the air, and the lasso of Zadok Brown dropped over the head and was snapped short around the neck of the red-skin, with a quickness that was like the flit of a swallow's wing.

Duke caught sight of the snake-like coil, and, almost at the same instant, saw the head of the Indian go down, and his heels up.

"Quick! quick!" called out Brown, "finish him before he gets loose again, or he will turn upon me."

Barlow let no time run to waste. As the Indian went down, he came up, and wrenching the knife

from the bewil'ered grasp of his foe, he bent over him with the purpose of driving it home, and ending the desperate encounter; but the helpless captive threw up both arms, turned his terrified eyes toward him and although strangling and choking, from the thong that had closed so rapidly about his neck, he managed to utter a prayer for mercy.

"Don't kill—don't kill—brave man—don't kill."

Duke bent down, and placed the knife close to the throat of his victim, who closed his eyes and awaited the deadly thrust. With one quick, dexterous movement, the rope was cut close by the neck, and the clogged breathing apparatus was free again.

"You tried to kill me when I was down," said his master, "and I made no appeal for quarter, for I knew none would be given. You knew how easily I could have wiped you out, but you begged me to spare you and I did."

"That was right—that was right," said Zadok Brown, coming forward at this juncture, having carefully hid the lasso which he had thrown with such dexterity, desirous as he was that the Indian should not suspect the part he had borne in the business; "when a chap asks you to let up, you ought to do it. It would be darned mean not to do so. Who knows who this red-complected gentleman is? He may be an orphan, with a rich uncle that can be persuaded to die pretty soon; he may be an only son that a widowed mother has to support; or a partner in a firm that can't spare him, or some public officer whose accounts will be mixed if he should peg out before the balance is adjusted. At any rate, it was a good thing that you let up on him, and I have no doubt that he appreciates your kindness; and if ever you or I shall fall into the hands of himself or his people, he will remember and reciprocate, for ever since I've been big 'nough to go to school I've read that a noble red-man never forgets a kindness or an injury."

By this time the Indian comprehended the unexpected mercy that had been shown him, and he rose to his feet, his towering form overtopping the others. He looked from one white man to the other, then stretched out his hand to Duke, while his painted face seemed to light up with a certain radiant glow, as if his intense hatred of the white man had been suddenly transformed into the closest friendship.

"Me no forget," said he; "brave man kind—Injun no forget."

"I hope you don't think I throwed that lasso," Zadok hastened to say, fearful that the red-skin might feel some enmity toward him. "I don't want you to believe I'd be so mean as to do that; but I think I know who he was," he added, in a very significant manner.

The red-skin appeared to understand what he meant, and turned his face inquiringly toward him.

"There was a man hanging around us out there that I'm pretty sure is the one who done that mean thing. He wore spectacles, had a high stand-up collar, a tall hat, and carried a blue-cotton umbrella under his arm. He had something done up in a paper, too, that I think was that darned lasso. It was a blamed mean trick, but if he hadn't throwed it, I don't exactly see how you two would have got the chance to adopt each other as brother; for it looks to me, just as I throwed the rope—that is, just as I saw the man with the spectacles throw it—that the gentleman here with the red complexion was going to make friends with your dead body first."

The Indian seemed to tire of the loquacity of Zadok, and turning toward his friend, said:

"You go 'way—many Injuns—kill all white men—go 'way—bad place here."

"Do you mean in this spot, or off yonder where our camp is?" asked Barlow, determined to get some information from the red-skin if such a thing were possible.

"Here—right here," replied the savage, waving

his hand so as to signify he meant the space immediately around. "Too much white men in camp—have too much gun—shoot hard—Injun let him 'lone—too much—kill white man come on hill—don't come here—stay away."

This was spoken with a volubility and earnestness which showed the red-skin meant every word that he uttered. It was confirmation of the suspicion of Duke that their enemies held this particular section with great jealousy against all comers, and that there was certainly some curious secret regarding it.

The red-skin was by no means as loquacious, as his singularly-formed acquaintances, and seeming to think that he had said enough, he turned about, without another word, and walked away, almost immediately vanishing from view.

"I wonder if he thinks I throwed that lasso?" exclaimed Zadok, in an undertone, as he glanced in the direction where the Indian had vanished.

"Of course he does," replied Duke, who had picked up his rifle, and was attentively examining the lock to learn the cause of its failure, "do you suppose he was fool enough not to see through that exceedingly thin yarn you told him?"

"Then he will be down upon me, won't he?" asked Brown, not a little alarmed. "Gracious alive! what an ugly-looking fellow he is!"

"I don't believe he will ever try to harm either of us. You see, with your help, and I can tell you, Zadok, that was a neat little fling of your lasso. I had the chap at my mercy. He can't help remembering that, and he has some gratitude about him—but we must do one thing to keep his friendship."

"What is that?"

"Stay away from here. You heard him give his warning, and if we disregard it, his friendship will be at an end."

"Then let us be going"—starting to move away. "I have had enough of the blamed old place, anyway. I believe it is haunted, and I never did like spooks, ever since the time I was throw'd down the well at home by them. Come, what do you say? Let's get up and get."

"We'll make believe, anyw'y," replied Duke, humoring the whim of his friend; "and then, if we wish it, we can steal up again when they can't see us. But I say, Zadok, did you notice anything odd about that red-skin, when he was talking with us? I mean, did you see anything singular in his appearance?"

"Can't say that I did," replied the puzzled fellow, wondering what had got into the head of his friend. "What did you observe yourself?"

"He was the first Indian that ever I saw that had gray eyes."

"Are you sure of that? It was a wonderful thing, indeed, and we must get Major Mufton to put an account in his report to Government, of the blue-eyed tribe of Injins that are found upon the Upper Yellowstone."

"Which goes to prove that, instead of being a genuine red-skin, he is a white man dressed up so as to make people believe he is an Indian."

Zadok was amazed. It had never entered his head that such could be the case, but the observation of his companion seemed to establish it beyond a doubt. Instead of quieting or lessening his alarm, it seemed rather to increase it, and he showed a greater anxiety than ever to get away from the place, which had been the scene of so many strange adventures to him.

Convinced that it would be the wiser course to leave for the present, Duke led the way, sauntering along in a very different style from that adopted when he came; for now he wished to be seen, and then he did not. In this way it required but a short time for them to reach the spot where they had left their horses tethered. They were found cropping the grass, apparently perfectly satisfied that their quarters could not be improved upon. Zadok

mounted his at once, and Barlow was still lingering behind, as if loth to do so, when his friend pointed to the saddle of his steed, and exclaimed:

"Look there, Duke! What next? We must be traveling on enchanted ground."

The object which had caused this exclamation was a piece of white paper fastened to the saddle, and even from where the speaker sat, it was plain to see that it had something written upon it. Duke lost no time in removing the loosely-folded missive, and examining the words, which were written with red chalk, in large, scrawling characters:

"We want not your life, but we are prepared to take the lives of a thousand men if they come upon our property. This is to give you fair notice that if you, or any of your friends, are seen within a hundred yards of the spot where the signal-fire burned this morning, you will never live to return."

Duke Barlow read these words out loud; then, making sure that there was nothing more written thereon, he carefully folded it up, and placed it away in his pocket, with the air of one who has secured a great prize.

"I will take that home as a memento of the strange land I have visited. I think it is a curiosity worth framing. But come, Zadok," he added, in a sharp tone, "we are fooling away time. We will ride back to camp, and then, if you want to go a little deeper into this business, I think I see a good opening."

"I don't mind doing it, Duke, if it can be managed without so much risk; but I'll be shot if I want to crawl into any more such nests as we did this morning."

"We have one big advantage," continued Barlow, "they have given us this warning, and they think we will not disregard it. That's a big thing for us. When we go back to camp, do you take your glass, and get around to the other side of the ridge, while I'll follow another course, and then we can make our observations at long range, and we'll stand some chance of finding out something."

Zadok seemed to become bolder as they neared camp, and he agreed to the proposition of his friend. They remained but a short time, when they separated and took entirely different directions, and so, instead of following their adventures jointly, we shall have to take them in turn, for a brief time.

The last wish of young Brown was to place himself in the lion's den again, and he made up his mind that, if he knew his own heart he would keep a goodly distance between him and that portion of the ridge of which they had been warned in such eloquent language. The direction which he had selected to follow was over such a wild and broken country that a horse was useless, and he took it afoot, carrying his lasso coiled and hung at his waist, and his rifle slung over his shoulder. Besides these, he had a single-barreled pistol thrust into an inside pocket, and it may be said that he was pretty thoroughly equipped.

Circling round, he made his way over the ridge, at a point fully a mile above the spot which held such terrors for him.

"There! if any of them gray-eyed red-skins are on the lookout, and have seen me, I don't think they can object to that," he said to himself, as he made his way down the opposite side of the ridge.

Almost immediately, he entered a region of the wildest grandeur. Not only were the trees of greater size, and more towering proportions, but the ridge itself seemed to be the dividing line between two totally dissimilar countries. The forests were dense wherever there was space for them to grow, immense rocks constantly interposed, seemingly impassable barriers, the dash and roar of waterfalls constantly filled the air, and from an elevated position, more than one rainbow could be seen, where the sun shone through the mist that rose from the cascades and canyons. Over the vast sweep of country innumerable lakes gleamed in the

sun, with the wild-fowl slowly gliding over their surface, or searching for food among the sedges and bushes that grew in some portions along the shore. Here and there, too, the glass revealed an Indian canoe, gliding stealthily along, as if the red-skins swept the paddle with greater softness, conscious that the stranger had invaded their hunting-grounds, and the time had come for him to strike the treacherous blow.

It was no wonder that such a place had great attractions for the members of the exploring party—and but for the accident that had led a couple of its members in that direction, it is not likely that the ridge would have been visited at the point where Duke Barlow had so narrowly escaped with his life.

Zadok Brown had traversed the border of this interesting country before, and he stood for some time, with his gaze wandering over the enchanting expanse out before him, when he descended the mountainous ridge, and continued his *detour* with the purpose of gaining a position from which he could study the enchanted ground more at his leisure.

He had fixed in his eye an elevated point, nearly opposite to the one which he desired to scrutinize, and he aimed for that at once, a little apprehensive that he would find some difficulty in reaching it, as there seemed to be a large number of rocks, and very probably a canyon or two, that it was necessary to cross before the post of observation could be gained.

But this was preferable to crawling along the ridge itself, where if the passage was much easier, there was the constant liability of stopping some red-skin's bullet or tomahawk.

"It is always best to view such places from a distance," he reflected, as he tugged along. "I never was much of an admirer of the Sioux Indian. The first one that I met took a pipe full of tobacco that I handed him, and then tried to scalp me when I turned my back, and our guides told me they were all the same—Hello! what does this mean?"

Most unexpectedly to himself, the traveler found himself upon the very margin of one of those canyons, so numerous in the upper Yellowstone region. He had noticed the roar for some minutes before, but had not supposed himself in the immediate vicinity, until he had brought up within a few feet of the edge. Standing motionless a few seconds, he advanced a few steps nearer, with great care, his purpose being to take a look into the boiling caldron below; but the sight was so terrifying that he laid down his rifle and crept forward upon his hands and knees.

The sight that met his gaze was enough to shake the strongest nerves. The canyon at this particular portion was no more than twenty feet in width, and as it comprehended in itself the volume of a large river, the depth must have been very great. Looking downward, the current could be seen sweeping along with fearful velocity. It was remarkably clear, but its depth was such that it had a dark emerald appearance, through which no glimpse could be caught of the bottom far beneath.

A short distance above some rocky projections caused the swift current to churn itself into foam, the spray rising far above the banks, and giving forth the faintest glimpse of a rainbow, as the sun, low in the sky, threw its nearly-horizontal rays against it. A hundred yards below, the same beautiful sight was to be seen, and but for the terror inspired by the frightful rage of the dashing current, any one could have looked upon the scene with delight and astonished enjoyment.

The banks were solid walls of rock, rising perpendicularly above the water, and their naturally dark surface looked black from the moisture that was constantly dripping from them. As the width was too great for Zadok to think of leaping across, he lay still a minute or two, looking down with a feeling of fascination into the dizzying sweep and rush of waters.

The deafening roar that filled his ears prevented his hearing the tread of a moccasin behind him, as the figure of a Sioux Indian came out from the cover which had concealed him a few minutes before, and advanced steadily toward him. When within a few paces of where the unconscious white man lay, the red-skin paused and looked about him. So far as he could judge, no human eye was watching his movements, and he felt secure.

He had no weapon in his hands, and being now within an arm's length of his victim, he stooped down, grasped a foot in each hand, and then with a quick jerk up and a fling forward, Zadok Brown turned a complete somersault over into the boiling canyon below!

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE ESCAPE—THE PURSUIT.

To say that the victim of this frightful act was astonished would be a very weak way of stating the position. No pen can depict, and, indeed, no one can imagine his emotions, as, with his gaze fixed upon the bewildering, arrowy sweep of the contracted river, he suddenly felt himself lifted from the rock, and pitched head over heels into the seething hell of waters.

He had barely time to draw in one quick, gasping breath, when he went down beneath the surface, and was borne forward as if fired from some giant piece of ordnance. Zadok fortunately did not descend deep enough to touch bottom, but came to the surface almost immediately. His thin, muscular frame helped to make him a powerful swimmer, and, with his limbs free, he devoted every energy to save himself—if such a thing were within the range of human possibility—from the awful death that impended.

As his head rose into the air and his eyes cleared of the water, he cast one glance backward to the rock from which he had fallen. Through the mist and spray, he caught sight of the figure of an Indian, his form towering aloft like that of a giant, while a fiend-like expression of exultation seemed to make his hideous countenance luminous.

Was ever the gratification of malignant hate more complete? Could revenge against an abominated race be sweeter or more perfect? Was there not a certain originality in this means of punishing a foe, that would thrill with delight the heart of the true Indian?

It was only one horrifying glance of this demon-like countenance that was seen by the hapless Zadok, when he was whirled out of sight, on his rushing way down the foaming torrent. Finding himself in the middle of the stream, he made an attempt to reach the side with the purpose of grasping some of the projecting points of the rocks. He found it easy enough to carry himself to the proper place, and he clutched at a jagged point with his right hand.

He caught it firmly, but his arm was almost wrenched from its socket, as the resistless momentum carried him forward with an undiminished speed. Had he seized an obstruction with both hands, there would not have been enough power in his two arms to stay his tremendous progress—that is so long as his body was in the full grasp of the canyon. Could he have managed to leap part way out of the water, there would have been more hope.

A man has to think quickly at such a time; and it did not take Zadok long to comprehend the position. He saw that there was nothing to do but to go unresistingly with the current, and watch for the opportunities that it might please Providence to put in his way. If there were any such to come, they would have to come speedily, for it was impossible that he should continue down the canyon at this tremendous speed, without being hurled against the rock and mashed to a gory pulp. What the spinning swimmer dreaded more than anything else was some cascade or waterfall, over which, if he

plunged, he was certain of being strangled in the furious caldron.

Presto! what a change, and before he was prepared for it, too! The canyon suddenly made a turn, and he was caught in such a powerful eddy or whirlpool that he spun around several times, with his forward motion greatly diminished. Now or never was the time, and with a desperate effort, Zadok threw himself half his length out of the water, catching a lip of the rock, and resolved to hold on "until something gave way," for he believed that if he failed this time no such chance would come again.

As it was, it took all the strength at his command, but he held on, and, as soon as he could recover from the shock, drew himself out of the water, and took refuge upon the table of the rock that projected sufficiently for the purpose. Here he found that he had succeeded merely in getting out of the current, but nothing more, for the top of the rock was far above his head, and he possessed no means of reaching it. He had barely room to sustain himself, but nothing more, and he began to debate whether he had not better drop into the water again, and take another chance, when he noticed upon the opposite side an opening that seemed to lead far backward among the rocks.

"That looks odd!" he said, fixing his eyes upon the place. "There's a cavern, certain, sure; but if any men or animals live in it, it seems to me that they've got a blamed unbandy way of getting in. Now if I could only get over there, I'd take a look inside."

The sun was so low in the sky that it was already growing dark in the secluded canyon, and Zadok thought he was doomed to spend a night here at least.

"I can't sit in this cramped position many hours," he said, feeling more uncomfortable from the very thought that perhaps he would have to spend an indefinite time there. "I'll become glued fast, and so stiff—Thunderation!"

Could he believe his eyes? There upon the rock above his head, suddenly appeared the form of two Indians. They were standing upon the very margin upon the other side of the canyon, and were gesticulating in a way which proved that in spite of the roar and tumult they were able to hold a very earnest and excited discussion.

In mortal terror lest he should be discovered upon his perch, Zadok shrunk back against the wall, until he suspected that he had left his own impression upon it. He was in great danger of being seen, and had there been a little more light in the canyon it is hardly possible that he could have escaped; but it could not be expected that the red-skins should have held any suspicion of a human being roosting in such an out-of-the-way place.

"I wish the darned critters would clear out," muttered the rigid Brown, as he kept his eye fixed upon the two dreaded persons. "I darsn't try to get up any plans for my relief, while they're hanging 'round. Hello! that's funny!"

This latter exclamation was caused by discovering that his lasso was still hanging at his side, just as he had coiled it when he left camp. Gun and pistol were, of course, gone, and it struck him as rather comical that, through the rough usage which he had received, the lasso, seemingly the most useless of all, had maintained its place. Looking down, he observed at the same time that a foot or two from the side of the rock the water was quite shallow, so that he plainly saw the bottom not more than a foot in depth. This, it should be explained, was not the true bottom, but was where the current flowed over the top of a projecting rock.

All this required but a few moments for him to take in, but when he looked up a greater shock of surprise awaited him. One of the Indians was coming down into the canyon, and the other seemed to be waiting only until he was out of the way, in order that he might imitate his example. During

the few seconds that had passed while Zadok was gazing downward, a rope had been produced from somewhere and the Sioux was going down as nimbly as a monkey.

He continued his descent until he reached the entrance of the cavern, into which he sprang and vanished on the instant. By the time he had done this the second Indian was following suit, and he speedily leaped out of sight, as if the cavern were an open mouth of some monster, into which these bites were tossed by way of food.

As may be supposed, Zadok Brown was somewhat amazed at what he saw, and while this pantomime was being enacted, the rock was not more rigid and motionless than he. The twilight in the canyon, the dark face of the rocks, and his novel position conspired to help him; and he was certain that when the Indians vanished neither suspected his presence.

After a moment's reflection Zadok had decided upon his course. His own lasso would take him across the chasm if he could get a "hitch" on the opposite side, and, once over, the Indian's rope would take him up to the plain above.

In dropping again into the water he found foot-room there by which to throw his lasso, and soon sent the coil whirling over the stream, aiming it at a jagged point of rock above the cavern, that seemed to offer a proper hook for his noose. The rope, true to its aim, caught, and sustained the greatest strain Zadok could give it. Thus assured, he made the venture of a swinging leap over the boiling water, to land safely in the very cavern's mouth.

Just in time, too, for as he struck the rocky platform, the noose of his rope lost its hold on the rock above, and came tumbling down at his feet.

"Whew! that *was* a close shave!" he muttered. "But there is that Indian's rope yet, and up it I'll go to get out of this hole."

If there was one peculiarity which Zadok was noted for it was that of curiosity, and despite his own timidity, he felt an uncontrollable desire to explore the darkness and gloom of the cavern, whose existence he had learned in such a curious manner.

"It may have something to do with the secret of the haunted ridge," he muttered, as he stood debating with himself what he should do; "and it may get me into some blamed trouble, so I guess I'll dig out while I've got the chance."

With the intention of carrying out this exceedingly prudent resolve, he moved toward the mouth of the cavern, but instantly found himself between two fires, for in the gloom he distinctly saw a pair of legs dangling in the air, showing that another Indian was descending the rope for the purpose of entering the cave.

Zadok hastily retreated into the blank darkness again, the roar of the rushing waters fortunately drowning the sound of his footsteps. To his amazement, as he crouched in the gloom, three of these figures passed by, somewhere into the unknown depths of the cavern.

This proceeding raised his curiosity to the fever-heat, and when he caught the glimmering of a light in the distance, he did not hesitate to follow the invisible strangers, intent only upon learning whither they led, and what meant these mysterious doings which he had witnessed during the last twenty-four hours.

The light speedily resolved itself into that of a camp-fire. He could see figures moving around and back and forth, so that he knew there was a goodly company. They were not the kind of persons whose acquaintance he wished to cultivate. Zadok halted while still a safe way off, and carefully studied their appearance.

The result was a great disappointment. As near as he could judge there were a dozen Indians lounging about a very ordinary-looking camp-fire, and doing nothing in particular except to smoke and grunt, and occasionally ejaculate something which,

in the dull, hollow roar of the cavern, he could neither catch nor comprehend.

"Blast it!" growled the disappointed Brown, "all this time has gone to nothing. Hain't learned a darned thing, but— Helloa!"

A surprise suddenly overtook him, as he recognized in one of the figures standing in full view, the man whom he had lassoed earlier in the day, when he was on the point of dashing out the life of Duke Barlow. He was of monstrous size, and standing upon the other side the blaze, so that the face and whole front of his person was fairly seen, and there was no mistake in his identity.

Painted and attired as an Indian, Zadok would never have suspected his identity of himself, but for the revelation that had been made by his former friend. Instantly another query presented itself.

"If he's a white man, what are the others? And if they are white, what, in the name of common sense, do they try and make themselves red for? It must be that we're somewhere in the neighborhood of the haunted ridge after all. I remember the canyon took me that way, and it would be funny ag'in, if I should have struck the right spot in this way. I guess I'll hang around awhile, and mebbe I'll have something that'll do to write to the papers about."

But hanging around did not help clear up the mystery which was torturing Mr. Brown. It seemed rather to deepen it, and to render him more exasperated than ever at the manner in which his anxiety was baffled at every point. Several of the men seemed to be interested in some other portion of the cavern, and were going and coming every few minutes; but there was no additional light to tell whither they went, and what they were doing, and Zadok at last concluded that he had undertaken a conundrum which he could not answer.

"I ain't going to stay here any longer," he growled between his teeth. "I'll get Duke and the rest to come down here, and may be we'll find something, if we work all together, that it will do to report to the Government."

He carried his lasso now coiled at his side, and upon reaching the mouth of this singular cavern, the rope used by the others was still there ready for use. It was a very easy task after grasping it in his hands to draw himself upward until he reached the rock above, where he stood clear of all further danger from the terrific anger of the canyon; but it was not very pleasant, after reaching *terra firma* again, to discover one or two figures approaching the spot upon which he was standing.

"Blast it!" growled the impatient Brown, who was tired of seeing these sham Indians, "can't I git clear of the critters? They seem to be chasing me all over creation. Gracious alive! I do believe they've seen me," he gasped, as he saw the two making toward him.

He had ducked his head and stolen off to one side at the first glimpse of the strange figures, but he forgot that his own position, on account of its elevation, made him unusually conspicuous. Seeing that he had been observed, Zadok started off on a run.

The two men did the same, and one of them called out in very good English:

"Stop there, you dog! We've got you, and if you don't knock under I'll pepper you!"

CHAPTER V.

HEAVENLY MUSIC.

DUKE BARLOW could not forget that he had undertaken a work of great delicacy and difficulty, and one in which he could not look for success without using more caution than he had done heretofore. It was very plain that the bogus red-skin that had warned him to keep away from the haunted ridge, knew too much to believe implicitly that the warning would be heeded, and he and his con-

federates were certain to be on the lookout for all intruders.

Accordingly, the young adventurer made an approach no less circuitous and cautious than that of Zadok Brown; but as the route was opposite his, they parted company and were out of sight of each other almost instantly. Duke took a southerly direction, which led him over very much the same route that they had already followed with their horses earlier in the day—but he went over it on foot, and at such a tardy rate that by the time he reached the spot at which he aimed and which was within a short distance of the spot where he had the scrimmage with the red-skin, it was already growing dark.

At intervals, on the way, he had used his glasses, and made every observation possible, but had failed in detecting any thing of moment. He could discover nothing of other Indians, a failure which had nothing strange in it, as the red-skins, or hunters, or whatever they were, could experience no difficulty in avoiding the keenest scrutiny. The signal, had died out, and turning his eyes in the direction of the distant hill, not the slightest trace of the answering smoke could be made out against the deep blue sky behind. More than once he caught sight of the members of his own company, as they pursued their explorations in different directions, seemingly without thought of any disturbance from the malignant Sioux, that had hovered upon their flanks ever since the expedition had penetrated the upper Yellowstone region.

Duke stretched out upon the ground, under a dense brush, with his eye-glass in his hand, to ruminate upon the situation. He had lost a great deal of sleep for the past week, was very tired, and without any suspicion upon his part of what was coming, he dropped off into slumber, which undoubtedly would have continued until daylight, had it not been broken in upon in a very singular manner.

With his mind full of the business upon which he had come, he naturally fell to dreaming upon it. There was nothing noteworthy in his vision of sleep, except that he had a vivid fancy of hearing some one singing in a wonderfully beautiful voice. This belief became so intense that it finally awoke him, and upon rubbing his eyes, he found that instead of fancy, it was the truth. There was some one singing in a voice of remarkable sweetness, and that, too, very close at hand. It was not until he had made sure by every test at his command that he had full command of his senses, that he would not believe that it was another phase of a rather curious dream.

His next proceeding was to find out from what direction this strange music came. He refused to believe the result until it was impossible longer to shut his eyes to it, but a curious feeling stole over him, as it became certain that it sounded in the air above his head!

Yes; there was no mistaking it. Those beautiful air-tunes were born in the dark atmosphere, as if the earth were not capable of giving birth to such marvelous music, and when Duke was certain of the source whence they came, he sat enraptured and enthralled, fearful to move, and scarcely daring to breathe, lest he should break the spell and end the enchanting strains, just as it was permeating every fiber of his being.

Fainter and fainter, until they seemed dying out in the ether, miles above his head, and the aching ear was doubting whether it heard at all, or whether it was not the sighing of the night-air through the branches above, when it swelled forth in louder and louder increasing strains, as if the being from whom it issued was making a downward sweep through the air, like the curve of the swallow.

And then it warbled forth in such bewitching sweetness—such bewildering variety and richness, that the charmed listener forgot where he was for the time, and was fairly transported out of himself—his one wish—his single prayer being that he

might enjoy forever that heavenly delight—that he might breathe out his very life, borne aloft by that strain which held him captive and enchained.

All at once, it ceased with a suddenness that was like an electric shock, and Duke started up and looked warningly about him. Then he folded his arms, leaned against the tree, bowed his head, and with closed eyes waited for it to begin again, not moving hand or foot, through a vague fear that by so doing he would frighten away the spirit that had come to bless him.

But it came not again—even though he waited and listened long. He had heard all that was to be his at the time, and he drew a great sigh like one who has just seen some inestimable prize slip from his grasp forever.

"I always ridiculed those who believe in supernatural doings upon the earth," he said to himself, "but I will do so no more, for I cannot deny the proof that has been given my very eyes. Earth cannot produce such music as that, and my experience has been one of those which don't come to a man twice during his life."

He suddenly checked his self-communing, and started as a strange, almost indescribable sound broke upon his ear for a second only. It was such as might be made by the sweeping rush of some great bird, as it shoots in front of a person's face. Duke drew back, as if the wind fanned his eyes, and looked furtively about, as if to discover what it meant.

For one moment he believed he saw an immense dark body shoot upward from the trees, but if such were the case, it almost instantly vanished in the darkness, which was greater to-night than upon the preceding evening.

"It must have been a delusion," he muttered, "although I am prepared to hear and see anything in these parts. If the world ever held haunted ground, this must be the spot."

Barlow was given little time for wonder and speculation, for while he was meditating upon that startling, rushing sound that had filled his ears for the moment, something bright flashed upon his eyes, and looking up, he saw the same light that had so puzzled him upon the previous evening. It resembled the moon in appearance, and having risen from some point among the trees near at hand, continued steadily rising until it reached an elevation of several hundred feet, where it seemed to remain stationary for several minutes.

All this time Duke kept his eyes fixed intently upon it, and he now saw it begin that awaying, oscillating movement that had puzzled him so much before. The arches through which it swept gradually widened until they were fully fifty yards in extent, when they abruptly changed their character, inverting themselves in fact, so that it appeared as if it were traveling on the rim of a vast wheel.

This peculiar motion lasted but a short time, when it began running in the line of a horizontal revolving wheel. This in turn was followed by a variety so diverse and eccentric in their nature as to be indescribable, when, as if the programme had been exhausted, all was blank darkness again.

The majority of mankind undoubtedly would have been more alarmed at the latter display than at what had happened first; but it was not the case with Duke, who found that his suspicions formed twenty-four hours before, were growing stronger and stronger upon him.

"Now, if there was a cavern under me," he said to himself, "I think it would help me clear up the mystery."

As the reader may have suspected, he was standing at that very moment over the immense cavern in which, some time after, Zadok Brown groped for a long time, in a vain attempt to comprehend another phase of this curious affair.

But the young man had come to this spot in quest of knowledge, and he showed more pluck in following up the slight clue that he had gained, than most

men would have done under similar circumstances. Fixing in his mind the point from which the light had seemed to come, he began picking his way toward it, moving with all the caution of an Indian scout when approaching camp.

When he had reached what he had deemed to be the spot, he found himself without any additional information. The only difference that he noted in the nature of the ground was that he stood upon a more rocky surface than before, and he was still groping about when his foot suddenly dropped into a hole, that was almost large enough to let his body through. As it was, it required some violent effort before he succeeded in extricating himself, his work hastened somewhat by the discovery that a strangling gas was ascending through the same opening, and that it needed but a few seconds more for him to become smothered thereby.

"That's about as near as it is safe for me to come," he concluded, as he sidled off again. "There are some queer performances in these parts, but I think I am beginning to get an inkling of what they mean."

Just then his ear, on the alert, caught the sound of footsteps near at hand, and he sprang back in the darkness and listened. The gloom was too dense to distinguish anything, but there could be no doubt that several persons were moving about within a few feet of him.

Now and then they mumbled something to each other, but in so indistinct a voice that he could not tell what was said, nor indeed whether it was in the Indian or English tongue. Once or twice they came so close that there was danger of their running against the cowering figure by the tree; but fortunately this was averted, and they took themselves away a few minutes later, and Duke Barlow was left alone again.

The conclusion that our hero had reached was, that there was a strong party of men—probably partly white and red—who were guarding some secret of the haunted ridge. What the secret was it was his purpose to learn, as well as the explanation of some of the means taken to guard it from discovery—which means, as matters stood at present, entirely passed his comprehension.

As nothing was to be gained by exploration, Duke determined to remain where he was, quite sanguine that something would be seen before morning, which might be lost if he went elsewhere.

Nor was he mistaken. Less than half an hour was passed when, happening to look upward, he caught sight of the round, moon-like object, scarcely fifty feet in a direct line over his head, and slowly descending as if aiming for his cranium. He carefully watched it for a minute or two, until when it was within a short distance of the top of the tree, it swung off to one side. This gave him such a view that he identified the object as an ordinary illuminated lantern.

"Aha!" he whispered to himself. "That helps me a good way along with the business. A lantern, swung out in space by a long rope, must be sustained by something more than simple air—By George! there it is!"

Through the gloom above he caught the outlines of an immense ball-like object slowly descending toward the earth. One glimpse, faint as it was, confirmed the original suspicion of Duke that this whole business was carried on through the agency of a powerful balloon.

The next question was, such being the case, by what means was it able to ascend in such a straight line. The mental query was hardly made when it was answered by the discovery of a rope fastened to the lower part of the passenger car, and then to some point below. By this means the balloon was kept almost directly over the spot, from which it went up, and back to which the efforts of two or three men speedily brought it. In the darkness the cavesdropper had not detected the rope which was now quietly drawing the balloon earthward, after

having permitted it to ascend a distance of perhaps a thousand feet above the surface.

It will be understood how a man seated in the car, and holding the lantern suspended by a cord, could easily cause it to oscillate and describe the eccentric movements already referred to. The gas which had come so near strangling him, very probably was that which was used to inflate the balloon.

His curiosity now was to ascertain who and how many were in the latter. As it continued steadily to come down, he scrutinized the dark car, and was pretty sure he could recognize two persons; but their figures were very dim, and one of them might have been some inanimate object.

"Why don't you hurry up down there?" demanded one of the occupants, in a suppressed, impatient voice, as he leaned his head over the side of the basket and vented his ill-nature upon some one who probably didn't pull at the rope quite as hard as he ought to have done.

The growl effected its purpose, and the inflated silk descended much more rapidly than before, while the scout in the tree leaned so far outward to get a better view of the contents of the suspended basket, that he was in imminent danger of falling to the ground and breaking his neck.

"Yes! there *are* two in there," he exclaimed, in an excited whisper. "I can see the man leaning over the side and who just spoke, and the other is a lady. Great heavens! can it be *her* voice that I heard? Impossible! no human being can sing like that."

But the young man was intensely interested in what he saw, and he began descending the tree in the hope of reaching the ground as soon as did the balloon. Fearful that he would fail, he was rash enough to let go his support altogether, and to fall a distance of fully twenty feet. By good fortune, he landed upon the soft earth, and escaped with hardly a jar.

Stealing softly forward through the wood, a hissing sound told him that the balloon was upon the earth, and the gas was rapidly escaping through the valve above. The subdued murmur of voices indicated the spot where the men were at work, and he approached as near as was possible without discovery, but as the moon was very faint, and the wood at this particular portion was quite dense, he was absolutely unable to discover anything at all, and he guided himself by his ear alone.

Sounds indicated that instead of the balloon being carried away, it was packed up and left where it was.

"Very well; I think I will pay this place another visit when I can have a little daylight to help me—that is, if the spot is not guarded so closely that there is no chance for me to get within seeing distance."

A few minutes later, and the sounds indicated that the party were leaving the place. As they were sure to cross open spaces where they would be exposed to view, Duke lingered behind, so as to give them sufficient start to prevent his betraying himself.

When he judged that something like a hundred yards separated him from them, he followed after, picking his way with great care, for on this still night a very slight sound could be heard with great distinctness, and he was liable at any moment to make a misstep that might prove fatal.

A short distance traversed in this manner, and a more open space was reached, and for the first time Duke gained a glimpse of the party that had excited such a great interest in him. There were four men and one lady, and all, including the latter, were attired in the costume of Indians, and he had no doubt but that the men, at least, were also painted.

It was natural that our hero should feel at once a deep interest in the female, who he began to believe must be the one that had held him enchained by her wonderful music when floating above his head. Love first develops itself in the form of interest, and

no matter who or what this personage might be, the fact that she was the owner of such a marvelous voice could not fail to draw attention to her, under any circumstances.

Besides this, so far as he could judge in the dim moonlight, she was young and of beautiful figure, and his fancy already invested her with still greater charms of face and feature. There was such a spice, too, of the romantic in the whole business, that young Barlow was led irresistibly forward, and he felt willing to assume any risk for the purpose of placing himself *tele-a-tele* with such a remarkable personage.

Down the ridge the party continued their way, and then, moving northward, took a course that led them toward the canyon in which, it will be recalled, Zadok Brown had such a remarkable adventure. They were aiming, indeed, for the rope, which was the only means used for entering their cavern home. He who was following at such a safe distance, supposed they were seeking their retreat, but he could have no idea by what route that place was to be gained.

The wood became still more open, and as they neared the rushing torrent, Duke was obliged to linger still further in the rear. Great as was his curiosity to see and learn more, he felt the importance of averting all suspicion on the part of those whom he was following.

Thus it was that he had fallen a couple of hundred yards in the rear, and he was still picking his way along with great care, when he noticed a sudden commotion among the party in front. Rapid exclamations were uttered, forms could be seen darting about, and a moment after he observed that the female was running toward him at full speed, with two of the men in pursuit. She seemed to run as lightly as a fawn, and by starting so unexpectedly, gained considerable advantage. But the men were fleet-footed, and they came up so rapidly with the panting fugitive that nothing was more certain than that she must ultimately fall into their hands if no other means was at her instant command.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRITICAL MOMENT.

THE only other means that could possibly be tried upon the part of the fair fugitive was that of hiding, and she seemed to comprehend this after fleeing but a short distance, for she darted aside and crouched behind a mass of irregular rocks, between and around which grew a mass of scrubby, stunted bushes. She made several feints, and displayed considerable ingenuity in approaching the cover, effectually hiding from her pursuers the final spot in which she gathered her form into the smallest possible space, and then tremblingly awaited the issue of the hunt.

It so happened that at the moment the young lady crouched into her concealment, she was no more than twenty feet from where Duke Barlow was also endeavoring to avoid observation. He was excited to the highest pitch upon witnessing this episode, and twice he raised his rifle with the intention of shooting the foremost, but, as they came nearer, he lowered that weapon and took his revolver.

"I'll wait and see whether they find her, and if they do, I'll sail in and take a part," he muttered, as, holding the pistol in one hand, he glared out from his concealment like a tiger ready to leap upon his enemies.

It looked as if escape was impossible. The two men attired in their Indian dress instantly separated and moved in different directions, one passing upon one side and one upon the other of where the fugitive had taken refuge, and from which, doubtless, she was looking out with a trembling heart upon their efforts to recapture her.

Her actions were a most eloquent appeal for help, and Duke Barlow would never have forgiven himself had he turned a deaf ear to such a prayer.

Indeed, he could not do so, and it required all the philosophy at his command not to rush out and engage the scoundrels who dared to use one of the opposite sex in this brutal manner; but by a supreme effort he restrained himself, and watched and listened.

"What's the use!" exclaimed one of them with a frightful oath, as he stopped walking and addressed his companion, standing but a short distance away. "We can't find her to-night, and she can't get far away before morning."

"But she may reach the camp of them devils over yonder."

"There are one or two places where she can get over the canyon, and we'll watch them so close that she won't get a chance. We'll find her when daylight comes, easy enough, and then won't Mike make her walk chalk for this?"

At which both gave out a coarse laugh, as if nothing could delight them more than to see some brute beat the tender woman, who had made this desperate attempt to escape from their loathsome custody.

"I'll stay here," said the other, "and keep watch so that she doesn't slide off into some other place, where we'll have a long hunt for her in the morning. You go on back with the rest of the boys, and let them have things all working right for to-morrow. I think it is about time we made a strike, and they can keep to work to-night while I play the part of a sentinel over Miss Kitty, without exactly knowing where to put my finger upon her."

This suggestion struck the other so well that he acted upon it without a word of reply, and a minute after the disguised white man, rifle in hand, and wide awake, was watching and listening for something to indicate where the young lady was doing her best to keep out of his reach.

"I think the face of matters will be changed somewhat in the morning," Duke Parlow said to himself as the other departed. "This affair begins to look as though I would take a hand in it."

But on the eve of "sailing in," he drew back, as he made the discovery that the girl was cautiously moving out from her hiding-place. He was so situated that he could see her distinctly, as in a crouching position she stole softly along under the shadow of the rock, edging off toward the spot where he himself stood, with the evident intention of getting back into the denser part of the wood that grew upon the crest and side of the ridge.

This was managed so skillfully that the painted sentinel, standing a short distance away, neither saw nor suspected what was going on. This all promised well, but Duke saw that he and the young lady must meet very speedily, and after a fashion which was not altogether such as he desired.

"Miss Kitty" continued her stealthy advance until she was so near him that she caught sight of the form of a man in the gloom, and recoiled with a suppressed scream.

"Have no fear," Barlow hastened to say, in a cautious undertone, but not caring much whether the sentinel heard them or not. "I'm a friend, and will protect you."

"Sh!" she whispered, quick to recognize the situation; "he will hear us."

"And what if he does? Give him no thought, but come with me."

"No—no, no," she added in an excited whisper; "he must not know of my leaving the spot; he must not know that you are here. If we can reach the ridge without it being suspected, I shall have a good chance of getting away at last; but I cannot if he finds out where I am."

To satisfy her, Duke was more cautious, and the two moved away as stealthily as if their lives were certain to be the forfeit of discovery.

Duke supposed, from the little confusion already created, that they had been detected, but the model

sentinel showed as much vigilance as if he was asleep; and, after picking their way along for a short distance further, they continued with as much indifference and carelessness as if under no surveillance at all.

Now that there was little fear of discovery, he permitted his fair companion to take the lead, until in the course of a few minutes, they stood upon the spot where she had landed after her aerial flight. He had supposed that she was searching for some path or trail that would lead her out of this dangerous neighborhood, and that it could only be found by making their way to the ridge. His amazement, perhaps, may be imagined, therefore, when she coolly announced her plan of escape was by means of the balloon!

"But," protested the dumfounded Duke, "why place yourself in such danger as that when there is no necessity for it? You have but to go with me back to camp, where a hundred well armed and brave men will defend you to the death against all enemies from whatever source."

"Your camp is ten miles away, and I could not reach it when they are on the watch."

"Are there not leagues of forest, stretching on every hand, and do you believe that I can not lead you to safety through it?"

"A deep and rapid canyon runs between us and that, and there are only two or three places where it can be passed in safety. They will guard them all."

Duke recalled that in going back and forth he had always passed this dangerous obstruction at the same point, and he had no doubt but that she spoke the truth.

"If you cannot go to our camp, remain in hiding until to-morrow, and I will bring fifty hunters and riders to your rescue, and there is no force that can withstand them. Will not that be the safest course that can be taken?"

"No," was the ready response. "There are not enough men here to withstand the force you might bring; but there would be a desperate fight, and more than one would be killed; they would shoot many of your friends when they tried to cross the canyon. They know every nook and turn of these mountains, and there is no place in which I could hide that they wouldn't discover me at the earliest dawn of light. I wonder that I was not found a few minutes ago. This can all be avoided by entering the balloon and passing far above their reach, and with no means at their command for pursuing us."

"But—but, where is the balloon?" asked Duke, still doubting whether he really comprehended her daring and original scheme.

"It is here within a few feet of where you are standing."

"It must have gas to ascend."

"And that is here, too. There is an orifice in the rocks from which it always issues. We have but to apply the mouth of the balloon and we shall secure all we want. Help me here, and you will soon see for yourself."

Could this be reality, or was it a part of the supernatural that seemed ever to hold reign on and about the haunted ridge? The fact of finding a balloon in this part of the world, with the gas at hand with which to inflate it—but he recalled that he was in the land of wonders. Only a short distance further up were geysers, and subterranean fires, and he had known of the gas issuing forth in many places not far away from where they stood. Indeed, as we have shown, he had narrowly escaped strangulation in that very place.

Still it seemed to him that this gas had not sufficient buoyancy to lift much of a weight, and he inquired whether the balloon was capable of carrying both, forgetting, at the same time, that it had been drawn down less than an hour before with two persons in the basket.

"It has lifted four and it ought to be strong enough," was the convincing reply.

Duke said no more; but under the direction of his beautiful friend went to work. The balloon was of immense bulk, and when not inflated was a large, cumbersome mass itself, handled with great difficulty, and had not a portion of the work been already done by his enemies, it is doubtful whether these two could have completed it.

Attached to the bottom of the car, and secured to the netting that spread over the dome of silk, was a stout rope, with a hook which was secured to a staple, fastened in the solid rock. When the balloon was being filled this held it in position. The lower part of the sack narrowed down into a small pipe, the end of which was leaded, to prevent its flapping about too much. This was lowered into the aperture of which we have spoken and then the gas rapidly filled the interior. All that those in charge had to do after accomplishing this much was simply to wait until the necessary buoyancy was attained, then unloose the hook and it steadily ascended until an elevation of a thousand feet was reached. At this point the longer rope was exhausted, and the balloon was held stationary as far as any elevation was concerned, although, if the wind was blowing, it would bound about and back and forth like a feather in a gale.

Something like half an hour of groping around in the darkness was required before matters were got in shape; but at last Barlow enjoyed the strange emotion that the huge collapsed bag of silk was steadily inhaling the all-buoyant gas, and that, if nothing intervened, he was sure of making his first balloon ascent in the wild region of the Upper Yellowstone.

"Will not some of these men suspect that you have some such a scheme as this in your mind?" asked Duke when the process was fully under way.

"That sentry believes he is still guarding me at the bottom of the ridge. Even if he thought I was away, he would know that I could not secure the inflation of the balloon alone, and what reason has he to suppose that you are with me?"

This was reassuring in a certain sense, but the circumstances were so peculiar, so novel, that our hero could not free himself of a certain nervousness lest these "White Indians" should come down upon them before their preparations could be completed. He made sure that his weapons were in order to receive any attack, and the strange romantic interest which had been so aroused and intensified during the last few hours, was absorbed for the time in the one dread of such an interruption and the desire to get away before it was too late.

It cannot be said that the desire was upon his own account, for he felt fully able to take care of himself, but something seemed to tell him that if, in the case of his companion, this resulted in failure, no second opportunity would ever be given her.

The process of inflation appeared interminable. Hour after hour dragged by and still it did not seem more than half full. The bottom of the wicker basket, about six feet long and half as broad, was covered with three bags of sand, and he proposed that they should be thrown out so that they might go up as soon as there was sufficient gas to carry them.

"It will not do," she replied, showing not a trace of the agitation that so stirred him. "We must have ballast or the balloon will become unmanageable. Suppose we find ourselves coming down in the middle of a lake, or among a band of Indians, we should have no means of saving ourselves without the ballast."

"But there is so much of it that we might throw out some—say half—and go up with the rest."

"I have more interest in escaping than you," and Duke thought that he could fancy the sweet smile with which this was uttered. "We will do that when we can do no better."

"You may be right, but it seems to me that you are running a risk that is likely to prove fatal."

Most of the night is gone, and before we suspect it, we shall have daylight upon us. Discovery must come then, if not before."

"Yes; but every minute that we can gain here is of incalculable worth. I feel as though it may be just that which we need to make our safety secure. It does not need a great deal more."

Both involuntarily cast their eyes upward, and in the dim night the vast dome of silk swelled out above their heads, so that it must have been as high as the surrounding trees. It seemed as if it could contain no more, and the mistress of ceremonies declared that it was about four-fifths full.

"There is enough now to carry us upward, with the ballast," said she, "but we should not ascend very fast nor very high. Let us take our seats within, and if anything should happen, we have only to cut the connecting rope, and we shall be off like a sky-rocket."

Duke hastened to act as she suggested. The sand was arranged in such a manner that two comfortable seats were furnished. Miss Kitty, as she admitted her given name to be, placed herself at one end of the basket, while Duke sat at the other. There was found room for both, without interference, and he could well understand the delights of such an aerial journey, when made under different circumstances from the present.

It seemed to him that the atmosphere was gradually growing lighter, but he had expressed so much apprehension that he was loth to do so again unless he could be positively certain.

It increased so rapidly that, a few minutes later, he knew there was no mistake about it; and he was about to speak, when his companion said:

"Daylight is at hand, and the balloon is so full that it can hold no more. We shall be off in a minute."

Rising in her place, she dextrously drew the small mouth of the sack from the opening in the rocks, both of them getting a blast of gas at the same moment that nearly strangled them.

"Now you will have to cut the rope," she added, as she seated herself again, "for we haven't enough strength to pull the hook out of the staple."

Duke leaned over the side of the basket, knife in hand, and reached toward the rope which held them bound to the earth; and in doing so he caught the sound of a hurried tramp up the mountain-side, and a furious voice:

"What — — — are you doing there? Get out mighty quick, or I'll shoot the life out of — — — jade!"

"Oh, quick! quick! quick! or we are lost!" wailed the girl in an agony of terror, clasping her hands and falling back in her seat as if she were about to swoon. "I waited too long; why did I not take your advice?"

Duke Barlow fully comprehended the frightful danger, and never did poor wretch apply hunting-knife with more desperate energy than he. The weapon was sharp, but it seemed to him as if the rope was made of wire. He could feel the knife cut into the strands at every effort he made, and yet it did not cut through. Still the balloon tugged in vain to get loose.

"Aha! you've got a devil there with you!" roared the White Indian, his face aflame with fury as he tore savagely forward.

Frantic with chagrin, Duke gave one or two more strokes, and then, with a premonition of despair, felt that he was caught and would have to make a fight for it; for it would never do to let an enemy come down upon him while he was in such a posture—totally at his mercy.

There was no time to draw his pistol—the foe was upon him—and grasping his knife, he rose to his feet in the attitude of defense.

"Come on, you painted hypocrite," said he; "as long as there is not more than one or two at a time, I don't care for the whole infernal pack of you!"

Crack! went the weapon in the hand of his assailant, and Duke felt the whiz of the bullet beside his face. Then the man came at him with a knife, confident that he would hew him to pieces in a few passes.

The first thrust was skillfully parried, and then Barlow made a dive at him, which narrowly missed burying itself in his breast.

"Come out of there!" growled the assassin, with another terrific oath, as he caught him by the shoulder and drew him forward. Duke in turn gave him a smashing blow in the eyes that sent him tumbling a dozen feet backward.

Thoroughly aroused, he leaped out upon the ground to finish him with his knife; but at this juncture, Kitty screamed:

"Quick! Oh! we are lost! Here they all come!"

One terrified glance, and it seemed, in the early light of morning, that the men were springing forward from every direction. Forgetful of all else, Duke jumped back beside the frantic fugitive, ready to defend her to death!

CHAPTER VII.

A HOPELESS PRISONER.

WHEN Zadok Brown found that he was in for a race for life, he let himself out in his best style, and as he was a capital runner, he would have made a good record for the first mile or two, had the conditions of this trial of speed been such that he could have watched his heels as well as his head; but it was night, the ground was strange, and his pursuers possessed great speed and bottom.

The fugitive aimed for the dense wood that lay off to the right, in the hope that, once within its dark depths, he would be secure against discovery, and such very likely would have been the case, had he succeeded in reaching it. But he was no more than fairly under way, when one of his feet became entangled in a running vine, and he turned three or four somersets before he stopped to get up.

By that time three of his pursuers—the third having speedily joined the other two—were upon him. He even had not opportunity to put himself in an attitude for flight, when he was a prisoner.

"One of Major Mufson's white-livered skunks," remarked one of the men, dressed and painted like an Indian, but speaking after the manner of his own people.

"What business has he here?" inquired a second.

"None at all. All trespassers have been warned off, and them that's cotched, why, they gets their wizens pinked."

"Let's pitch him into the canyon, just to see him hob about."

"Thunder! don't do that," pleaded Zadok. "I've been in there already, and had enough bathing to last me all summer."

"If you was in there, how did you git out?"

"Dug my toes and fingers in the sides of the rocks, and c'imbed out," replied Zadok, suddenly impressed with the idea that he ought to conceal some things which he had learned during that frightful adventure in the water.

"Yes," replied the first speaker, with a sneer, "we'll give you another chance to do the same thing, if you're so fond of it."

"Who the blazes said I was fond of it? I wouldn't mind if 'twasn't for the rocks; but after a feller's head's been used to split about forty tons as he goes along, it gets sort of monotonous, and he'd like a change. I say, couldn't you vary things a little, by giving me a chance to run a race or throw the lasso for drinks?"

"What the deuce is this?" asked one of the captors, as he noticed the rope coiled at his waist. "Do you know how to use that?"

"I s'pose there's plenty as can beat me," replied Zadok, concluding it best to disparage his ability; "but if you want me to try it, I'll give you a show."

if you'll run out on the bank and let me see whether I can't yank you."

The men showed no disposition to accept the offer of their prisoner. Indeed, they were in no mood for jesting nor for listening to his jests, and paying no attention to what he said, they placed themselves around him in such a way that there was no chance for escape, and I began discussing the best plan for disposing of him.

One man favored shooting him on the spot where he stood and thus ridding themselves of the elephant that had fallen upon their hands; but there were others who were more cautious. His death would be discovered by some of the exploring party, who had located themselves so uncomfortably near, and they would be likely to institute investigations that would result in unpleasant consequences. The trouble was that they had already received too much attention from that direction and they wished rather to shut it off than otherwise.

The most generally-favored plan was that of pitching him into the canyon, as his death, discovered to have been met in that manner, would not be charged to them; but there were one or two who seemed to apprehend that there was just the slightest possibility of escape, in which case their position would be ticklish in the extreme.

All this time Zadok stood by, hearing every word that was uttered, and taking an interest in the argument that we need hardly say was of the deepest kind. He felt very much like taking a hand, or rather a word, in the discussion, but he knew under the circumstances he would be ruled out.

It was finally agreed that he should be flung into the canyon, there to be drowned and battered to death in the roaring torrent as it fought its way through the narrow, rock-bound channel; but there were prudent reasons for not desiring to throw him in at this particular place, and it was agreed that he should be taken to the other side of the ridge and thrown in at some point in that portion. From such a place there was no earthly possibility of his going through the passage in the mountains with his life, and his dead and mangled body could tell no unpleasant secrets.

Among the three men was not one who raised the voice of mercy. All seemed equally desirous of inflicting death upon him who had not harmed them—their only anxiety being to make it so certain and secure that it need cause them no after fear.

These were not the men to hesitate, and as soon as the decision had been reached they moved off over the ridge, with their prisoner well-guarded. The latter, as may well be supposed, was engaged in an immense lot of thinking, for he could not fail to realize in what a critical situation he was placed. What should he do?

Set up a yelling and screeching that could be heard a mile beyond the roaring of the canyon?

He had the voice at his command, and was confident of his ability to perform such an exploit—but the only result likely to follow was the cracking of his head. The only other expedient that suggested itself was that of breaking away and trying another run, but the chances thus offered were very remote, and his captors had guarded too well against it.

"I wonder if I couldn't fling the noose over all three of their heads, and strangle 'em in a pile," he muttered, as he reflected upon the desperate situation in which he was placed.

"I am ready to try anything, if I could only think of something to try."

The party made good progress, and in half an hour had passed the top of the ridge, and were going down the other side. They had hardly begun doing this when the light of a distant camp fire was seen, and instantly attracted considerable attention. Zadok caught enough of their conversation to understand that they suspected that a party of genuine Indians were in their proximity, and, after considerable discussion, they decided that instead of flinging their prisoner into the canyon, they would sur-

render him into their custody. The red-skins would be very much delighted to obtain a white prisoner, so as to have their hands well in by the time they captured a few more of the exploring-party.

They acted with characteristic promptness in the matter, and heading straight toward the camp-fire, reached it within half an hour more. Here, sure enough, were six Sioux Indians—wild, frightful-looking savages, who had made the shedding of innocent blood their aim for many years. They were as vengeful and unrelenting in their hate as the catamount, and their highest felicity was to make the strong man, weak woman, or helpless child send up the wail of distress and anguish. They were a part of the main body that had been for weeks hovering on the flanks of the Mufton Expedition to the Upper Yellowstone, in the hope that they would be able to fall upon them unawares, and "lift the hair" of every living one of them.

The white and red Indians were on the best of terms, and a few words and a still fewer minutes were all that were needed to effect the transfer, and within a quarter of an hour of their meeting, Zadok Brown found himself a prisoner among a half-dozen bloodthirsty Sioux, whose swarthy, wrinkled faces seemed to light up with fiendish delight, as they pictured the suffering that human frame was capable of enduring for their delectation.

Zadok made two or three attempts to open a conversation with them, but they affected not to understand a word he uttered. As the hour was quite late, they had finished their supper and were engaged in smoking their pipes, with two of the Indians acting the part of sentinels. Without any preliminaries, they bound the hands and feet of Zadok with his own lasso, and laid down to sleep in the center of their circle, and quite close to the camp-fire.

The poor fellow had a faint hope that some of the hunters or explorers were abroad in this neighborhood, and discovering his helpless situation would raise a party to run to his rescue, but the hope was very faint, indeed, and after considerable hesitation, it was dismissed altogether. It was not to be supposed that the situation of our friend was such as to cause very pleasant dreams; and yet, it did not prevent him from sinking into a sound slumber, which was never broken until the sun had risen above the mountains—even then it was the unfeeling kick of a Sioux Indian that did it.

Rising to his feet, as they cut his bonds, Zadok stared around, and saw that the savages were ready to move off. All were mounted upon ponies, every one of which the prisoner recognized as having formerly been the property of the exploring party, and one of them was the identical quadruped which he had bestrode within the previous forty-eight hours.

There was none for him now, and they headed off toward the north and directly away from the direction of the haunted ridge, and the camp beyond, so that his hopes sunk to zero, as he recalled that every footstep was taking him further away from the prospect of rescue.

He was obliged to walk while the others rode—but the way was so rough and difficult that he was able to make as good progress as they and with considerable less difficulty. Reasoning upon what he had learned from the old hunters of the party, he concluded that the red-skins were making their way to some village further north, where the whole or half the tribe might enjoy the exhibition they proposed to give.

The signs indicated that the red-skins had partaken of a hearty morning meal, without once caring to awaken him for a portion, and the inevitable consequence was, that he felt so excessively hungry that he asked for something to eat. They refused to give it, only permitting him to take a few swallows of water from a brook that was running hard by the site of the encampment, when they resumed their journey northward, Zadok still carrying his

lasso—the only weapon he possessed—coiled at his waist.

The party had gone but a short distance when considerable excitement was caused by the sight of a balloon, floating about a mile above their heads. The Sioux kept looking up, pointing toward it, and conversing in excited tones. They had seen it before, and were on such terms with the owners that they seemed to comprehend its nature and purpose; but there was evidently something in its present appearance which excited more than a passing interest. They had probably been so long accustomed to seeing it float steadily above the ridge, that they did not understand this movement.

Another interesting fact was, that it was moving northward, in the same direction with them, from which the Sioux judged that their friends far afield were desirous of keeping them company.

The red-skins shouted and swung their arms, and two or three loaded and fired off their guns, as if to express their delight at the friendship of the men who had the wonderful power of drifting miles above their heads; but no answering signal came from the balloon itself, which drifted slowly northward, in that staid, unconscious manner which makes it resemble a giant thistle floating away into obscurity. In truth, it looked to Zadok as if no one at all was in it, and, knowing as little as he did about it, it struck him as probable that it had broken away from some of the frontier towns, and had sailed for many hundreds of miles through the lofty atmosphere.

When the Sioux had watched the figure until their necks ached, they resumed their journey, still heading northward, and doubtless wishing for a closer acquaintance with the occupants of the car. Zadok naturally felt some interest, and watching the bird-like object sailing at such a great height, he noticed that it was considerably ahead of them, and veering to the west, so that, in case it descended before nightfall, there was little prospect of its landing anywhere within a reasonable distance of them. He cared naught whether it did or not, for he felt that the enemies at that great altitude were fully as treacherous and ugly as those upon the ground, and there was no necessity of increasing the demons who were already guarding him with such watchful vigilance.

The most interesting question that Zadok could consider just at present was, when the party was likely to reach their destination, for he had no doubt that that was the time decided upon for the "band to begin to play." If their village were high enough to be gained at or before nightfall he had no hope at all; but if another encampment in the woods should become necessary, he thought he saw a bare possibility of something turning up for his benefit.

The Indian prisoner always longs for nightfall. There is not one chance in a thousand of accomplishing anything in the daytime where one's jailers are so watchful as these red-skins; but at nightfall there are many things to inspire hope of success in the most desperate of schemes.

At noon a halt was made and dinner eaten, and to the surprise and delight of Zadok, a small party was sent to help himself to the rarely cooked meat, the only food partaken of by the Sioux. He found it on the outside of a large quantity, and felt a somewhat toning-up of his courage. It seemed to him that there was some chance for him, if he could only decide how to set to work; but there was too little time. He had racked his brains for hours, and was still at as great a loss as ever.

"I've read about fellers getting out of tighter scrapes than this," he reflected. "One white man against six Injins—yes, they say it's been done—but I'll be durned if I can see how. I could choke 'em to death if I could once draw a noose around their necks; but I'd have to take 'em one at a time, and it ain't likely that while I was polishing off one the other five would sit down and fold their hands till their turn came 'round. It would be a good thing if

some of these chaps that are always showing how one man can knock over five or ten Injins with a claw ofterbacker, were put in a place like mine. They'd learn a thing or two, I reckon."

An unusually long halt was made, and Zadok found his hopes greatly increased on that account, for it seemed to him that they would not be likely to do this unless there was a long journey before them.

The balloon was still visible, far to the Northwest, looking like a black speck drifting off into the vastness of space. Beyond it, and in the background, were the faint outlines of a lofty chain of mountains. These were a soft, bluish tint, and the elevation of the "air-ship" was such that it looked as if it were hovering over their very crest—now rising a little above, and then descending again, so that no violent stretch of fancy was necessary to suppose it a ball that was bounding up and down upon the "back-bone" of the lofty ridge.

The route of the Sioux during the entire afternoon led them through such a precipitous and broken country that their progress was scarcely half what it had been during the forenoon. They appeared to be following a trail which led over many places that the ordinary traveler would have pronounced impassable. Poor Brown never believed the ponies were capable of doing half as difficult traveling, until they were forced to do it by their Indian masters. He found no trouble at all in keeping up with them, and, indeed, had the easiest task. Several times they exchanged signals with other parties in the distance, and Zadok noticed particularly that in many elevated places smoke could be seen as though companies were communicating with each other by this means.

Darkness finally descended, and found the party upon the top of a ridge, very similar to that which had been the cause of the captive's trouble, with the exception that it was almost devoid of trees. This was the place that the Indians would have avoided beyond all others had they been in a hostile country, as it was peculiarly exposed to observation; but the Sioux had nothing to fear in that form, and they not only encamped here for the night, but proceeded at once to build a large roaring fire that could be seen for a distance of several miles in every direction.

This was another indication of a large force of Indians being scattered through the country, signaling each other by this means. Zadok's immediate captors seemed to be anything but regular in their habits, for, although the fire burned vigorously, and they could have secured any quantity of game in the vicinity, no steps were taken toward doing so, and they simply tethered their ponies at the bottom of the ridge, and then stretched out before the fire with only one of their number acting as sentinel.

Zadok was placed directly in the middle of a circle, the others being stretched around in a position that he could not pass them without stepping over. But there was no intention of permitting such an attempt even, for his feet were bound securely together, and then his wrists were fastened with his own lasso, so that he was as helpless as if he possessed no limbs at all.

"I'll keep awake and watch my chance," was the determination of the captive, who believed from the feeling of the thongs around his wrists that he could force his hands through them.

He waited and watched a long time, and was still waiting and watching, when he dropped asleep; but an awaking speedily followed, such as it is probable that no mortal ever experienced before.

CHAPTER VIII.

"UP IN A BALLOON."

As Duke Barlow saw the white Indians rushing upon him from every direction, he discharged his revolver at the nearest heads, and then drew his knife for the furious, dead-end hand-to-hand struggle.

The foremost wretch made a leap with the purpose of springing into the basket, but the defender caught him on the edge and grappled with the fury of a tiger.

At this instant the nearly-severed rope suddenly parted, and the balloon began slowly rising.

"Push him out! push him out and we are safe!" called out Kitty, seeing the ground receding. "Oh, can I not help you?"

Duke had seen it, and he gathered all his strength, but his foe had noted the change also, and he resisted with tremendous energy; clinging to the basket with one hand, he struck with the other, and strove mightily to gain a foothold, so as to force his body into the wicker-basket, where he would be given more advantage; but Duke was fully aroused to their deadly peril, and he rained his blows with the madness of desperation. The White Indian howled like a wounded bear, but still clung and struggled, until one supreme sweep of the clinched fist sent him spinning downward upon the heads of his infuriated comrades.

Crack, crack, went half a dozen rifles, as the vengeful bullets sped upward, fired by the baffled men, who would have fired the gas had they possessed the power.

"Lean forward, or you will be struck," called out Kitty, catching the arm of Duke, and drawing him toward her. It was all done impulsively, and with an instinctive desire to save her noble defender's life, but it was no more than natural that he should clasp his arm about her waist, when he found their heads close together, and that, in the exultant joy of the moment, he should exclaim, in a fervent undertone:

"Never fear, dearest, we are safe now."

"But some of the bullets may strike you."

"We shall soon be beyond their reach, my darling, and then we shall have nothing to fear from them."

Numbers of the bullets struck the bottom of the basket, and some pierced it through, but all were checked and held by the sand-bags placed there as ballast, and which served as an impenetrable shield. The balloon, freed of its incubus, shot rapidly upward, and in a few seconds was beyond the reach of the longest-ranged rifle that was ever fired. Nevertheless, the pop, pop, of their guns could be heard for several minutes as if the exasperated white Indians hoped that some stray shot might possibly reach them.

By and by, Duke Barlow ventured to lean over the side of the balloon and look out. The sun was just rising, and his sensations were novel, strange and thrilling. The great earth appeared to be sinking, and his view was extending with such a bewildering swiftness that for a time he forgot he had a companion, and that he had so recently passed through a frightful struggle for life, and his soul was absorbed in the contemplation of the panorama rolling out before him.

Miles of woods, through which the dull gray and black rocks could be distinguished—winning streams of water, cascades, ponds, and lakes—other chains of mountains, constantly rising to view beyond those that had hitherto bounded this field of vision—ridges, hills, gorges, ravines, and valleys—level stretches of prairie, long broken patches of forest—waste places—with an ever-expanding area of new wonders and delights—constituted his experience, for minute after minute, as he leaned over the side of the car, and gazed enraptured and enthralled upon the glorious scene.

Finally, as he became somewhat accustomed to the situation, he raised his head, and looked at his companion.

It was the first time he had gained a fair, full view of her, and he could scarcely save himself from an involuntary exclamation of admiration. Her complexion was as clear and as rich as a peach, her eyes of the deepest violet blue, small, white, even teeth, and a mass of exuberant hair of a golden

color. She was a perfect type of a Circassian blonde—one of those rich, lovely creatures that compel admiration from the most indifferent of the opposite sex. She was attired in the ordinary traveling-dress of the present day, her costume being such that it would have attracted no marked attention upon the street, excepting that she had on Indian moccasins, and a feathered band, which served as a head dress.

"You are not accustomed to this," she said, with a bewitching smile.

"No," replied Duke. "I was never up in a balloon before, and the sensations were so strange that I entirely forgot myself for the time—for which I ask pardon—but, excuse me, if I ask how I may address you."

"My name is Kitty Fowler."

"And mine is Duke Barlow. You have floated through the air many times, I suppose?"

"Yes; a great many—so often that it has lost its charms in a good measure—but I remember that I was more delighted than you the first time my father allowed me to accompany him."

"Was that in this place?"

"Oh, no; it was a great many miles away—poor father!" she added, with a sigh, as the tears gathered in her eyes, "he and I made many ascensions together, but he has made the last great one, from which there is no return."

Very naturally, Duke was full of curiosity to learn something of the history of his companion of whom he was so deeply enamored, and to find out how it was that she was among the white Indians of the upper Yellowstone. There was something so strange, so unprecedented in the circumstances of their meeting, and in their present situation, that the two felt unusually drawn to each other, and our hero was more direct in his questions than he would have been at any other time or place.

"Do tell me, Miss Kitty," said he, "how it is that you are found in this wild solitude, among a party of men who are fully as vile and treacherous as the Sioux themselves? How comes it that this balloon has been brought to this spot? Why are those men disguised as Indians, and why do they defend the haunted ridge with such jealousy? You can understand how great my curiosity is, and I have asked you enough questions to keep you talking for an hour."

"I do not wonder that you have done so," she replied, as she changed the sand bags, so as to give her an easier and more graceful position, "and if you can forget that you are about a mile above the earth, and will listen to me, I will give you a complete answer to all the queries propounded."

"Go on," laughed Duke; "enrapturing as is the scene below, it is not half so much a charm as is your voice. If you will talk until I ask you to stop, you will go on forever."

Blushing at this direct compliment, but making no reply to it, she said:

"Three months ago I had never seen and scarcely heard of this wonderful region. About that time, Messrs. Burns & Bingham, of St. Louis, formed a party to go to the upper Yellowstone, to learn what the prospects were for opening a fur trade in that region. It was placed under charge of my father, who was quite a skilled aeronaut, and had this balloon manufactured and made on purpose to bring with us. He did it as much for his own amusement as anything else, though he sometimes said, if we got into any bad place, he could manufacture enough gas to raise one, and he would send me aloft, while he and the men remained below to fight it out."

"Well, we got along very well, until we reached a point within a short distance of where you met me, when poor father got wounded by a poisoned arrow, and died. He had consented to take me with him against his own better judgment, and in answer to my earnest prayer—because I had no mother, and there were other circumstances which made it best that we should not be separated, I supposed after he

was buried that the men would return at once, or at least I would be sent home under an escort, but I found they were all determined to go forward. I could not understand the cause, then, but I learned afterward, that several of the men, who were half-breeds, had been in this section before, and believed that they knew a place where diamonds existed. They were on friendly terms with the Indians, as they had lived with them, and they seemed to think there was a chance to make their fortunes.

"Up to this time they had all treated me respectfully, but after the death of father my position became very dangerous. I was a lone woman, with no one to protect me from insult, and not knowing what would become of me in the end. The man who had been on the most friendly terms with father was named Powers, and I endeavored to conciliate him and enlist him as my defender. He became the leader, and finally took me under his protection. No one dared molest me now, but I found to my alarm after a few days that he expected and demanded that I should become his wife.

"You can hardly understand my terror and grief. I made several attempts to get away, preferring death at the hands of the Indians rather than accept him. I finally got him to consent to wait a couple of months until I was given a decent time to mourn for father; but he gave me to understand positively that he would wait no longer than the present week, and that if I made another attempt to get away, that should end the truce at once. Such was my position last night when I made the last effort to get away. It was Powers who fought so hard to get into the basket with us, and if he had succeeded you can imagine what my position would have been."

"It was a narrow escape, indeed. I thank God for it."

"Yes; I shudder now as I recall it." "But for what purpose did they use the balloon?"

"Well, they came on to this place, and went into a cavern which can be entered only by means of a rope that is lowered over the side of the canyon, and I remained hid in that for three days while they hunted with torches for me; but they found me at last, and then I was kept under closer surveillance. In this cavern they found a number of shining pebbles which they believed were genuine diamonds, and which possibly may have been. At any rate, they were in great terror lest some one should discover their secret, and they disguised themselves as Indians, so that if any hunters or trappers should wander in this direction, they would not be likely to disturb them.

"An opening was found in the rocks through which issued a constant stream of very buoyant gas, but although they carried the balloon with them, they did nothing with it until they found out that an exploring-party was coming in this direction. They were greatly alarmed then lest it should discover their secret, and for a time they knew not what to do. If it had been any other company they would not have cared so much, but they said among such a party were always a number who made it their special business to pry out everything, and if they came near the ridge, some of their scientific men could not fail to find out their secret, and then it would be all over with them.

"Powers found that a large number of Indians were following the force, waiting for a chance to make a blow, and as he understood the Sioux tongue and was well known among them, he opened communication and tried to persuade them to strike the blow, telling them that they could easily massacre the whole party and strike terror into the heart of their great father at Washington. But the chiefs were too cautious, and could not be persuaded into such a rash thing when they knew how small a chance there was of success. They very willingly agreed to hang upon the outskirts of the company and cut off such as they could, and there is no need

of my telling you that they succeeded in more than one case."

"True, they did; and we should have fared much worse if we had not a number of veteran Indian-fighters with us, who kept up an unremitting watch."

"They had several men stationed upon a hill some distance off, to watch your movements and to communicate with them by means of camp-fires. Then they resorted to the very childish stratagem of attempting to frighten you. At night they would inflate the balloon, and go to the height of a thousand feet, one of the men swaying a lantern and groaning and making all sorts of horrid noises. A person might have seen a hundred balloons further East, and yet he would never dream of seeing one in this part of the world. A man with any superstition in his composition would be apt to become pretty well frightened, and to stay away from such a place."

"Yes. I had my nerves shaken a little myself, but after I had watched that dancing lantern awhile, I suspected the ruse, and was trying to learn something definite, when I narrowly missed being shot by one of your guardians."

"Yes; besides doing all this, they kept two or three men on the constant lookout upon the ridge, and they would not hesitate to shoot any one that they detected upon the forbidden ground. So you see they neglected no precaution, and after all, I do not believe there is a genuine diamond in the neighborhood."

"Can you tell us what direction we are going?" now demanded Duke.

Kitty leaned over the side of the balloon and carefully studied the configuration of the earth beneath.

Duke did the same, but he was so totally at sea that he could not form the slightest idea of the points of the compass.

"Northwest," she replied, after she raised her head. "We are a good many miles from our starting-point, and have traveled so fast that if we should land now, none of them by any possibility could be anywhere near us. Beneath us, the wind blows in the opposite direction, so you see we shall have hard work to keep our bearings, and when night comes, it will all be guess-work."

"It will be dangerous to land before dark, I suppose?" he said, looking inquiringly toward her.

"And dangerous to land then; but we shall wait and see."

CHAPTER IX.

WOOLING IN THE AIR.

FLOATING a mile above the surface of the earth, away up among the clouds, with the most bewitching—most enchanting woman he had ever met sitting so near that her dress touched him—with the sweet rippling music of her voice constantly in his ear—with those deep, liquid blue eyes, becoming deeper and more fathomless every moment—could Duke Barlow ever forget that experience, even though he lived a hundred years?

Gradually, as they became accustomed to the aerial sailing, and the charm of novelty wore away, he drew in his thoughts from the world below, and centered them more upon the little world surrounding him. He became conscious that there was one being in the universe besides himself, and that she was seated beside him. It seemed as if he could never wish to descend to the earth below, with its care and trouble, vexations and sorrows. Thirst, danger and hunger were forgotten for the time, and he sat, as it were, at the feet of Kitty Fowler, enraptured, entranced and enthralled.

What wonder, then, that Duke's impetuous nature urged him on to sound the deep love-stream over which he certainly was gliding?

So back and forth he trimmed and veered and shifted in his art of words; but the wily girl seemed to baffle his indirect efforts to wrest from her any evidence of her heart's sentiments.

Poor Duke was in agony. Her words, if they meant anything, implied that her heart still remained unwon, and he was thrilled with hope thereby; but he must hear more. He was like the opium-eater, who feels that it is death to stop, and death to go on.

"Then answer me—this one question," he at length, in his desperation, said. "It may seem hasty and ill-ordered, when a dozen hours ago we had not seen nor spoken to each other; but the circumstances of our meeting were such that I feel as if we had been acquainted for so many months. Tell me whether your love has been won by another—whether in your distant home there is one who has been given reason to feel that he has a claim upon your affections?"

Kitty was silent for a moment, while her downcast eyes made her lashes seem to rest upon the glowing cheeks. It was as if she was recalling some painful heart-history, and controlling her emotions so that she might speak calmly. During all this time, Duke sat with his gaze fixed upon her, scarcely breathing, scarcely living.

It was only a few seconds, and yet they were like hours to the impatient, anxious lover. Finally she looked up, and with a face perfectly serious, replied:

"No, there is no one who can claim any promise of mine, either direct or implied, in the direction to which you refer. I will answer you this much, but ask me no more."

"One more question—one more answer," pleaded Duke, taking both hands now in his. "I would seek no advantage of my position—that would be the same in principle as the man Powers—but I would know whether you can give me reason to hope—whether I can count upon grounds of encouragement?"

"I can hardly answer that," returned Kitty, who seemed very cautious and who weighed carefully every word that she uttered. "I will say this much—that I will not discourage you at present. Please rest content with that."

"That is all I have a right to ask!" exclaimed the delighted lover, kissing both hands over and over again. "It is more than I dared hope an hour ago."

But Kitty forestalled the words he would have uttered. She evidently wished to change the subject of conversation, and did so artfully.

"You have a glass with you," she suddenly remarked; "please turn it to the south, and tell me whether you can make out a long, winding ridge, that seems to have only a very slight elevation?"

Duke Barlow at once drew forth his glass, and pointing in the direction indicated, finally announced that he was able to recognize such a place.

"That is the hill from which we made our ascent. It is all of forty miles distant, and I think we are gradually returning to it again. Besides

that, we are within a half-mile of the earth. The gas, you know, is constantly escaping through the silk, and we have been descending very slowly for the last few hours."

"Had I not better throw out some of the ballast, so as to rise higher?"

"I would wait. We shall reach the ground shortly after dark, and if we find we are in dangerous territory, then will be the time to throw out the ballast."

The balloon continued gradually descending until when it grew dark they were only a few hundred feet above the earth. Two of the bags of sand were placed on the edge of the basket so that they could be dumped over in a twinkling, and then Kitty and Duke carefully studied the contour of the ground, so far as was possible in the gloom and darkness, over which they were sailing.

There was a slight breeze, and the balloon was drifting slowly to the southward, but still they were so far north that they had nothing to fear from the white Indians, and they were only seeking some suitable place in which to effect a landing.

Duke, acting upon the advice of Kitty, did not pull the valve-rope, it being his intention to wait until the grappling-hook should catch in some secure place, when the gas could be exhausted as rapidly as they wished. In the mean time, it was prudent to hold themselves in readiness to rise at an instant's warning, if necessary.

CHAPTER X.

DEAD MAN'S LAKE.

Hour after hour passed away, and still Zadok Brown lay stretched upon the earth by the camp-fire, surrounded by Indians, while he pondered his brain over the question whether there was any possible means of escape from them.

It seemed impossible to think of any. Here he lay, with his ankles so securely tied that he could scarcely wriggle one of his toes, and although he had tugged and twisted with his wrists until they too were chafed and pained him, yet he could not see that there was any chance of freeing them at all. With his limbs firmly bound, with the vigilant Sioux asleep upon all sides, and another of their number acting as sentry, it would seem that nothing short of a miracle could extricate him from his difficulty.

Zadok understood that, according to all the works of fiction that he had read, the right course for him to pursue was to feign sleep. This would effectually deceive the red-skins themselves, who, including the sentry, would sink into a heavy slumber, during which he could take French leave.

So, after he had twisted and writhed in vain, Brown shut his eyes and went to snoring. In less than fifteen minutes it became genuine, and there was none in the entire company so deeply asleep as he. It continued fully an hour, when he was awakened by a cry of terror from the Indian sentinel. Opening his eyes, he saw the terrified red-skin dashing by with the speed of the wind.

There was a rushing sound among the leaves, and by the light of the fire Zadok caught sight of something writhing through the limbs. Then

it swung toward him, and he saw a long iron hook, scratching and tearing its way along over the ground.

Fortunately for the captive, he was quick-witted enough to understand what this meant, and that, by a wonderful provision of Providence, a chance for life had been thrown in his way.

Throwing up both arms as the rope swept toward him, he caught the hook fairly and firmly beneath his bonds, then shouted:

"Out with your ballast, quick! You're among Injins! Another minute and you're lost!"

By this time all the Sioux were on their feet, fully aroused and staring around them. The leader was looking to see whether their prisoner had changed into a bird, when *thump, bang*, something dropped upon his head which flattened him out upon the ground with the conviction that a horse had rained down upon him.

One of his devoted followers stooped over to draw the mashed chief from beneath the bag of sand, when there was a second whiz and a bang, and another one took him on the back of the neck and shoulders, and he went down with the impression that a two-story house had fallen upon him. The others were becoming bewildered and demoralized, and were gaping around and upward, when, as if to add the climax of terror, a storm of sand came sifting and rattling down in their eyes and faces in such quantities that they scattered howling into the woods.

In the mean time, the experience of Zadok Brown was hardly more enjoyable. When first caught by the grappling-hook, his weight was too great to be raised by the balloon, and he merely "tetered" up and down. To help matters, he would make a jump, which, aided by the buoyancy of the balloon, carried him up about a half-dozen feet, when down he thumped again, right over the head of one of the dazed warriors. His movements resembled very much those of the little images, in the philosophical experiment known as the bottle imps or Cartesian devils.

Only for a few seconds, however, when he swung clear of all obstructions and hung dangling a hundred feet above the earth, with the distance momentarily increasing.

In the gloom and darkness Duke Barlow caught sight of the dark object suspended beneath. He could see that it was a man, and then came clearly to his astonished ears the words:

"Pull me up! My hands and legs are tied so that I can't help myself. Pull up, mighty quick, for I'll be darned if I can stand this strain much longer."

"Zadok Brown, as sure as I'm alive!" exclaimed Duke as he began tugging at the rope. "It's the strangest thing that was ever heard of."

Poor Zadok, who was in an agony of terror, was drawn up—up, slowly, until at length his head came on a level with the edge of the basket.

"Easy, now," he admonished, "for I can't help myself a bit, and I'm too precious a cherry to be knocked off the stem after growing so high as this."

"Never fear, Zadok. I've got you all right."

"Thunder! is that you, Duke?" gasped the astounded Brown, as his friend solved the difficulty by placing his hands beneath his shoulders and drawing him, head-foremost, into the car, and at least temporary safety.

When all three had posted each other—or rather when Zadok and Duke had exchanged experiences since separating—the important question remained to be settled as to what should be done. Kitty learned from what the rescued captive said that they were still further north than she had originally supposed, and as the wind was not favorable, nothing was to be gained by remaining in the air. But all was decided for them, for in the midst of their talk, an ominous warning came. A tree brushed beneath the basket, proving that they had again descended. The added weight of Zadok had been too much for the balloon, which it was now evident could rise no more.

"Thunderation! there is the Antarctic Ocean under us!" exclaimed Zadok, who, leaning over the side of the basket caught the glimmer of the water. "We shall all be drowned and frozen to death before we know it."

"It is only a small sheet of water," said the young lady, who was standing up and carefully scrutinizing the earth beneath. "I think we shall drift across. We are still fifty feet above it, and moving toward the other side, which isn't far off."

"I don't know about that," returned Zadok, who was leaning dangerously far over the side; "we're getting durned near it—"

At this instant a sudden puff of wind caused the balloon to give a lurch. Duke caught at the heels of Brown, as he saw him going over; but he was too late to prevent his plunging out, head-first, and a moment later a loud splash was heard, as he dropped in the center of the lake and went down out of sight.

Relieved of the weight of one person, the balloon rose slightly, but the gas was too far spent, and after a moment's flutter the great globe descended and the grappling-iron caught in the limb of a tree on the border of the lake, the silk flapping about at an alarming rate.

"Quick! pull the rope with all your strength!" cried Kitty, catching hold to assist. Duke did as directed, and gradually the cumbersome mass of silk was worked down toward the earth. Before they reached hard land, Zadok Brown had come out of the water, and he united his efforts, so that, a few minutes later, all three stood side by side.

Once more the balloon began tugging upward, and they deemed it the best to permit it to go, as they had no further use for it, and if it should be discovered by the Indians at some point several miles away, they would be deprived of all means of finding the trail of its former occupants.

The first thing that the lovers did after landing was to go to the edge of the lake and take a long, refreshing draught of clear, cool water; and then—unsentimental girl that she was—Kitty demanded food—a good, substantial repast; so it was arranged that Duke and Zadok should cruise along the shore in search of ducks, which were known to be hidden in the rushes,

A short search revealed their game in plenty, for which Zadok was armed to capture. Having extemporized a lasso from one of the fine cords of the half-wrecked balloon, he was commissioned to noose a duck or two for the needed supper.

So, creeping along in the water through the rushes, the expert adventurer soon spied his game in a little open basin in the rushes, and with deft art, he quickly secured a great "green head"—enough for a good meal—and bore it in triumph to the shore. They then signaled to the lady, who rejoined them in a few minutes, highly pleased at the result of the hunt. As it would have been highly imprudent to kindle a fire upon the shore of the lake, where it could be seen for such a distance, they went further back into the woods, hunting up a place which seemed effectually screened from observation. Here a fire was started, and in an incredibly short space of time the bird was dressed, cooked and eaten.

"I wonder if there ain't any more of them humming-birds perching on the boughs?" remarked Zadok, when the last morsel had disappeared.

"Haven't you had enough?" asked his friend, in some surprise.

"Yes; just 'nough to whet my appetite. Now I know how wild-duck *tastes*, and I'd like to know how it feels to have all you can stuff."

"If you will go out and catch another, he shall be dressed, and you shall have it all."

"Hanged if I don't!" exclaimed the hungry fellow, leaping to his feet and starting off in the direction of the lake. "It seems to me that I haven't had anything to eat for three or four months, if not longer."

The lovers laughed as he moved off, and Duke said:

"You are tired, dearest, and need rest; let me wrap my coat about you, and I will make you a couch of boughs, where you can rest in peace until morning, while I shall be happy in the consciousness that I am watching over you, and in the belief that perhaps in your dreams I may have an humble part."

He pressed her so gently that she could not refuse. She had borne and suffered so much during the last twenty-four hours that she needed rest, and she consented.

"But I am not free from fear," she said. "I think this is the sheet of water called Dead Man's Lake. I have seen it from the balloon, but I was never so close to it before."

"Suppose it is that body of water, dearest Kitty, what then?"

"We are on exceedingly dangerous ground. It abounds with the most luscious fish—so large and fine, and held in such value by the Northern Sioux that they guard it as jealously against all intermeddlers as Powers and his men guard what they believe to be their diamond-mines. Hunters and trappers have sometimes encamped on these shores, tempted by its piscatorial richness, but the Indians have come down upon them like so many furies. And its name, it is said, was given it on account of the number of white men that have been slain on its shores."

"Whew!" exclaimed Duke, in mock alarm. "Major Mufton and his men will have hard

work of it if every place worth visiting is found guarded and defended in this style."

"It is a very serious matter," said she, reprovingly, "and I do not think we ought to have let your friend run the risk he has taken upon himself; but I never thought of this being Dead Man's Lake until a few minutes ago."

"But then we are quite a distance from it, and as soon as daylight comes we will fold our tents and depart. Rest, lady, rest, and I will keep faithful watch and ward over thee."

Kitty would not consent to close her eyes until the fire was subdued to a few embers, and her form could scarcely be distinguished. Then she sunk into a sweet, refreshing slumber, and Duke Barlow gave a sigh of pleasure at the thought that it was his sacred duty to watch by the lonely camp while she slept.

He paced slowly back and forth over the leaves for fully an hour, his thoughts wandering over the wondrous events of the past few hours. A delicious happiness stole through his heart at the conviction that, short as had been the time since he had placed eyes upon the beautiful Kitty, yet it had been long enough for him to win more than her passing regard. Not by the mere words she had uttered, but by her looks and manner, had she shown it, and he reflected upon the curious fact that he had met scores and hundreds of ladies and heiresses in his own native and in other States, and yet he could not recall one that had made such an impression upon him as had this fair and loved one, first seen in so strange and romantic a manner among the wild regions of the Upper Yellowstone.

Suddenly he started with the question:

"What is the matter with Zadok?"

Well might he ask the question.

CHAPTER XI.

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

AFTER the experience of Zadok Brown in the capture of the duck, he deemed it utterly improbable that he should incur any danger in a return so soon to the same spot. He had heard nothing of the peculiar dangers that attached to Dead Man's Lake, and after such a result of the reconnoissance of himself and Duke, it was natural that he should have scarcely a thought of disturbance from the Sioux, who, in reality, were liable to be encountered at any time and in any place in the Upper Yellowstone region.

The sky had cleared somewhat since he left this place. There seemed to be fewer clouds floating before the face of the moon, and as he stood on the edge of the lake and looked out he could see the full boundaries of the bushes and weeds that had alarmed Kitty.

"I guess I didn't scare them ducks away," he mused, as he stood with his feet in the edge of the water. "I think if I could get about seven, I wouldn't want anything more in the way of food before morning. 'So!'"

Yes, he was sure he heard a rustling in the bushes precisely the same as that which had caught his ear in the first place, showing that this must be favorite feeding-ground for the water-birds. With his lasso grasped in his right hand, ready to throw, he began wading out for

the game. He found that he was not precisely in the same line that he had followed, for the water deepened rapidly, and he had gone out but a short ways when it rose above his waist, bringing his head far below the tops of the rushes.

This was not exactly what he wished, for it was necessary that his arms should be left free, that he might fling his lasso at the critical moment. Zadok felt his way carefully forward, but the depth increased so fast that another step would have caused him to swim, and he stopped.

"This will never do," he concluded, looking about as well as he could. "I'll have to back out and take a start over again."

All this was natural enough, and Brown was proceeding to carry it out, when he made the discovery that while he had been hunting ducks others had been hunting him. Moving figures had been discernible on the beach, and, as the astounded and terrified Zadok made a careful survey, he was certain that there were at least half a dozen Indians along the shore.

"Thunderation!" he whispered, "they're hunting for me."

It looked very much like it, indeed, and Zadok concluded that for the present he must give over all thoughts of ducks and supper, and look out for his own safety.

The position of the man could scarcely have been more critically perilous. He was among the rushes, that inclosed him like a net, and beyond them stretched the broad, smooth surface of Dead Man's Lake, and within less than a hundred feet stood the Indians, who beyond question had learned of his presence on the edge of the water, and had come to hunt for him—so certain, too, of securing him, that they failed to act in their usual cautious manner.

"I guess I ain't quite such a fool as to walk into *that* trap," muttered Zadok, when he comprehended the situation.

Thereupon, he looped his lasso again, so as to leave his arms unrestricted, and began moving further out among the rushes, his intention being to reach the furthest edge, and then swim away to some point where it would be safe to land.

All this, it would seem, was easy enough, provided he could execute the movement in silence.

He had picked his way along with all care possible, when the land suddenly dropped such a distance that his head went under. The involuntary splash that accompanied this movement left no doubt in his mind that the Sioux had heard and understood it.

As he began swimming cautiously out toward the lake, he heard a grunt from the direction of the shore, followed by a rippling splash, which indicated that at least one or two of the Indians had entered the water, and were making toward him.

A shiver much colder than that made by the water passed down the back of Zadok, as he comprehended his deadly peril, and he asked himself at once, whether there was any means of escape. His first thought was of yelling for Duke to come to his assistance, but he could not help seeing how that would only complicate

without improving matters, and he was not selfish enough to desire to insure his own safety at the risk of his friends.

If he should venture out upon the lake, he would be certain of being seen, as the moonlight had become greater than ever during the last few minutes, while the watch of the Indians was so close that there seemed little hope of his making his way along the outer edge of the rushes to a lower point along the shore, without being detected; but a choice was demanded at once, and he took the former.

He distinctly saw the head and shoulders of two Sioux, gradually sinking down among the weeds, as they walked away from land, until they disappeared from view—by which time they were close at hand, and it was high time he made a move.

Zadok never employed his wits to better advantage. Feeling that he was caught in a desperate position, he used every advantage at his command. On the edge of the rushes he was shut out from view, but a short distance beyond, the moonlit surface of the lake must betray his presence to the Indians; and so, when he judged he was near the point in question, he quietly dropped beneath the surface, and swam with might and main, until he was forced to come up for air. When he did so, he lay upon his back, with the point of his nose only projecting to view. As his nasal ornament was quite prominent, Zadok duly thanked Providence therefor, and floated with no little skill in this recumbent position.

All know the distinctness with which sound can be heard beneath the surface of water, and the swimmer, as he lay in the position alluded to, knew that there were persons moving through the lake, and very close to him also. It would seem that with every portion of his body out of sight, excepting the point alluded to, that even the sharp eye of a Sioux Indian would have failed to locate him, when such a distance from the shore.

Such, probably, would have been the case, had the fugitive carried out the plan he had started upon; but he became alarmed at the sounds which reached his submerged ears, and feared that while he was floating the Sioux swimmers would approach and scalp him.

Accordingly, he once more dropped quite deep, and making all the distance possible, he came up, and at once struck out toward the middle of the lake, his purpose being to make for the wooded shore, as soon as he could secure sufficient start of his enemies. Swimming on his face required that he should expose more of his head and make a greater disturbance in the water. As if fate was against him, he accidentally, in the bewilderment of the moment, caused one hand to swish above the surface, and his position could not have been indicated more clearly had he carried a calcium light upon his crown.

The first notification he received of being seen, was not in the shape of a rifle-crack, as they evidently considered their game too sure to be thrown away in that style—but in two or three exclamations from those upon shore, doubtless intended to guide the two in the water. Zadok turned his head and looked over his

shoulder. Just beyond the edge of the bushes, appeared the tufted heads of two Indians, moving swiftly, in a direct line for him, and scarcely more than half a dozen feet apart. Every thing indicated a purpose of capturing instead of shooting him; for the opportunity of doing the latter had already been declined more than once.

For the present, it seemed to have settled into a fair swimming match, and the fugitive now called into play all the skill of which he was master, and the speed which he showed was doubtless a surprise for his pursuers, who caused their routes to diverge somewhat, evidently with the purpose of inclosing him in and shutting off all escape.

A ten minutes' trail developed the fact that one of the warriors was a capital swimmer, and the other a miserable one—a remarkably poor one to be found anywhere among a class of people who make physical excellence the aim of their lives. He fell so hopelessly behindhand at the end of the time mentioned that he voluntarily turned round and swam back to shore, leaving the race to be completed by the other two.

Between Zadok and the single Sioux a terrific struggle now took place. With no weapon at all with which to defend himself, the former knew it would be all up in case the red-skin once got his claws upon him, and so he threw all the strength and skill at his command into his arms, and swam as he had never swam before.

It was an even thing for a considerable time, and then Zadok saw that in spite of all that he could do, the savage was gaining upon him, and that if he could prolong the race for half an hour the result was inevitable. Satisfied of this, he turned his head, and gave his whole attention to the point toward which he was hastening.

He was quite a distance from either shore, but he saw that a little ways beyond that a headland projected directly across his path, and that he had only to keep directly onward to run upon it.

"If that should prove to be several rods across there's some hope for me," concluded Zadok, as he centered all his energies upon reaching the point. "I can make it some distance ahead of the red-skin, and I may get a chance to hide myself away from him."

The intervening space was rapidly passed, but the fugitive saw, to his dismay, as he neared it, that it was but a mere tongue of land, with scarcely any breadth at all; but it was his only hope, and he bent all his energies toward it, with the furiously swimming Sioux twenty feet behind him.

The moment Zadok felt his feet touch bottom, he dashed out like a frightened deer, and started to run; but when he had taken one or two steps, his dragging lasso got entangled in his feet and threw him forward upon his face.

The fall saved him when nothing else could have done so. It recalled to him that he had a weapon at his command, and he caught up the rope and coiled it in shape like an inspiration. At this moment he was screened somewhat by the shrubbery growing around him, and it is probable the impatient Indian did not observe him. As Zadok turned his head, he saw the stalwart red-skin step forth from the water,

and, grasping a murderous-looking knife in his right hand, make a rush toward him.

This was the critical moment, and Brown drove the lasso with all the skill and might he could concentrate in that right arm. Never was aim better; the rope was unusually limber on account of its being so wet, and it snapped about the neck of the Sioux like the lash of a bullwhacker's whip. Rendered desperate by his peril, Zadok gave it a "snub" that nearly wrenched his arms loose, and that drew the Indian violently to the ground.

It was all done in a twinkling, but the red-skin struck out frantically with his knife, and, after one or two blows, severed the strangling rope and rose to his feet. He made a blind movement, then staggered, threw out his hands, and fell dead from a broken neck.

Once more the skill of Zadok Brown had defeated the evil hate of the savages, and when he realized that all present danger was passed, his elation of spirits can scarcely be imagined; but he was too wise to remain where he was grinning and dancing upon the soggy earth, for the rest of the Sioux were near at hand, and would be sure soon to discover what had happened.

He paused a moment and listened. All was still save the gentle rustling of the wind among the branches. Dead Man's Lake spread out before him, smooth and glimmering in the moonlight, and on the furthest shore could be seen the twinkling of a camp fire, doubtless kindled by some of the party that had pursued him with such unrelenting fury.

"It seems to me these blamed Injins are getting mighty plenty in these parts," he growled, as he saw these evidences of their presence on every hand. "A fellow can't go hunting ducks without having a party pounce down upon him; I wish a lot of 'em would come to school to me next winter. Wouldn't I break the slates over their skulls, ram their heads into the stove and nail their toes to the floor? I'd beautifully adjust the balance in some way or other. Hello! what's that?"

Sure enough, just at that moment, he heard the sound of a paddle in the water, and immediately after saw the canoe itself speeding over the lake, straight toward the spot where he had landed.

This was a reminder that he was increasing his personal peril during every moment that he remained here, and he turned to steal away, when he was surprised at noticing that there was only a single person in the canoe. His curiosity, which had nearly been the cause of half of his trouble, caused him to wait a few minutes, in hopes of learning how this came about.

"Maybe they made up their mind that it would be the last of the warrior that followed me, and they've sent the undertaker to bring back the body to the waiting mourners upon the shore. If that's the case, I might as well—Hello! that's queer!"

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH DANGER AND STRIFE.

WHEN Duke Barlow asked himself the question as to what had become of his companion,

Zadok Brown, he recalled, with overwhelming force, the remarks that the sleeping Kitty had made about the danger that beset all white men who ventured in the vicinity of Dead Man's Lake.

"She was right," he said to himself, as he paused and listened. "I treated her warnings too lightly. Zadok has got into some trouble, from not knowing the danger in which he stands. He may need my help."

Again he paused and listened. All was silent. No scream of wild animal, no whoop of Indian reached his ear.

"Shall I leave her a few moments?" he asked, as he glanced toward the slumbering camp-fire, and the sweet form dimly outlined against it. "Can anything befall her while I am gone? It seems not, and yet I cannot leave her unconscious."

Stepping to where she lay, he pronounced her name in a low whisper, and she immediately opened her eyes, with all her senses about her.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a cautious whisper.

He explained that Zadok had been gone such a long time that he was becoming uneasy about him, and he asked her what was best to do.

"You have a gun, and he has not. Search for him at once. It is cruel to leave him alone."

"But what is to become of *you*?" he asked, tenderly, taking her hand within his own, and drawing her toward him.

"Have I not lived long enough in this wretched country to know what to do at such a time?" she asked, with a laugh. "Look to your friend, and have no thought of me until you return."

"That would be impossible," he replied, as he kissed her warm cheek. "I hope I shall be back in a few minutes."

"So do I," she said, in a half-timid whisper, which thrilled his heart, as he moved away, and almost instantly vanished in the gloom.

As Duke Barlow knew the precise direction taken by Zadok, he slung his rifle on his shoulder, and marched off at a rapid rate, hoping that his fears were unfounded, and yet with a strong presentiment that something was wrong with his companion, who had as remarkable a faculty for getting into scrapes, as he had for getting out of them.

The first thing that opened the eyes of Duke, was the sight of the Sioux, along the shore, back of the rushes. He saw them just in the nick of time to save himself; and, as it was, he would have been detected had it not happened at that precise moment the attention of the Sioux were drawn in another direction.

He recoiled, and moved back to a safe point, and then endeavored to find out an explanation of what he had seen. He was so far away, that he really saw nothing of the struggle that was going on in the lake; but a splash that caught his ear several minutes later suddenly apprised him of the turn affairs had taken, and he started around the shore of the lake, with the hope of heading off his friend, and lending him some assistance in his fearful struggle.

He noticed, with much surprise and an increase of hope that the party on shore remained where they were, leaving the issue to the combatants in the water, very probably under the

belief that there could be but one result. This was encouraging, and Duke was hurrying forward, with all the speed prudent, when he came within a hair's breadth of pitching headlong over an Indian canoe that lay directly across his path.

"A good turn of luck," he said, as he paused to examine it; "here is a paddle, and I've had enough of practice to know how to use it. This will give me an advantage over the Sioux in the water, and if Zadok will hold out a few minutes longer I think we'll get him out of this trouble."

He followed the contour of the lake, keeping under the band of shade until he felt that he was beyond sight of the part on the shore, when he struck toward the headland, for which he saw the swimmers were aiming. He had waited so long, however, that he was distanced in the race, and came to shore, it will remembered, when Zadok stood all alone with his vanquished enemy stretched lifeless before him.

"I tell you, Duke, this hunting ducks ain't what it's cracked up to be, unless the ducks happen to be the kind that yours be."

"It is good enough in almost any other latitude, but the Sioux are so plenty here, that we must clear out before they gobble us all."

Zadok was decidedly of the same opinion. Indeed, he had seen enough of the Indians to satisfy him fully, and all that he wanted to do was to get back to the Mufton Exploring Party with as little delay as possible. Duke, upon stepping out of the canoe, shoved it out into the lake again, and the two made their way along the cape to the main land.

As near as could be judged, they were about a half-mile from where Kitty was awaiting their return, and our hero was fully determined upon rejoining her, to start at once for Major Mufton's camp. He had had enough proof of the danger of that particular vicinity, and needed nothing additional to convince him that the best thing he could do was to clear out, without waiting even for the coming of daylight.

Now that the friends were clear of the haunting red-skins for the present, they used all care in making their way back again to camp. They heard suppressed whoops and signals on the other side of the lake, and were a little alarmed by the report of a rifle within a hundred yards of where they stood listening for such sounds of danger.

This caused a deviation in their course, and occasioned some uneasiness about Kitty, who could be at no great distance; but the lover tried to draw courage and hope from the confident words of hers when they separated, and he waited patiently in the hope of gaining some correct idea of the peril that impended.

All seemed quiet, and they moved forward again, until they had rounded the lower end of the lake, and recognized the spot where they had effected a landing with the balloon. All still remained as quiet as death, and looking out upon the sheet of water, it seemed as unruffled as if it had never been rippled by the foot of beast or paddle of man.

"Right in here is the camp-fire," said Duke, after he had carefully taken his bearings; "fol-

low this in, and we shall find her glad enough to see you back again safe and all right."

"But a darned sight gladder to see *you*," replied Zadok, giving him a dig under the ribs. "Oh! you needn't put on ignorance that way. I've seen it—I've been there myself, and know how it works."

"How what works!" demanded his friend, with an assumption of indignation.

Brown indulged in a quiet little snicker of his own.

"You ought to have more feeling for me than to make me explain a good joke like that, when I haven't done much else for the last twenty-four hours except to flounder around in the water. You know you're head-over-heels in love with that critter, and I know she's beginning to git kinder tender on you—I've see'd it myself, no mistake."

Like all lovers under similar circumstances, Duke affected to make light of that about which his companion spoke with so much certainty, and Zadok insisted with all the more confidence that "matters were fixed," until he was cut short by the question:

"Haven't we reached the place where we had our camp?"

"Purty near," replied Brown, peering around in the darkness. "I think this is about the place—Thunder and lightning!"

As he uttered this exclamation he bounded about five feet directly upward, with a howl like that of a dying grizzly bear. The fact was he had been standing on the embers of their own camp-fire, and one of the live coals had just burned through the side of his moccasin, and was doing the same upon the sole of his foot, when he made the leap and outcry already referred to.

He was the owner of a voice that could be heard a mile or two, and every Indian along Dead Man's Lake must have caught that howl, on that night.

"A rattlesnake!" exclaimed Zadok, forgetful of all other danger in his excitement. "I'm bit! I'm going to die, sure! Sit down and receive my dying message to the old woman and man at home."

Just then the affrighted fellow, in dancing about, knocked enough of the ashes away to show the cause of the trouble, whereupon he subsided with the consoling remark that he had probably scared all the Sioux away.

But Duke Barlow was turning over another important question in his mind, which was as to the whereabouts of Kitty Fowler. He had left her in the immediate vicinity of this spot, but nothing now was seen or heard of her. She must have recognized that voice, and if within call, would have been on the spot instantly.

"We must move off a little," he said, in an undertone, "some of the Sioux will be prowling around here in a few minutes, and it won't do to run against them."

"But where did you leave Kitty?" asked Zadok, in a cautious voice, as they carefully drew further back in the gloom of the woods.

"Here in this very spot; she must have found the danger so great that she has been compelled to get further away."

"I'll bet the Injins have cotched her" said

Zadok, echoing the very fears that were at the heart of the lover, but to which he dared not give utterance. "She needn't have gone very far, and if she had dared speak, we would have heard her long ago."

"Well, let us hope for the best," said Duke, with a heavy heart. "It seems as if we are doomed never to get out of this trouble, but it may be that the case is not hopeless. The night is well advanced, and we shall soon have some daylight to assist us. Kitty knows the country she is in and the people she is among, and she may need protection less than ourselves."

It was impossible for the lover to remain idle while he was in such suspense about the girl, besides which there was no doubt but that they were in great personal danger from the Sioux. Accordingly, they moved further into the wood, pausing near a pile of rocks, which was fully a half-mile distant from the lake. Here they had just sat down with the intention of waiting until daylight, when Zadok sprung up, with the exclamation:

"I saw a light then, in the woods! Some one else is near us, certain. Wait here till I find out who it is."

And, without waiting for a reply, he started off at once in the direction indicated, Duke remaining where he was, with some misgiving as to the result.

Zadok had a strong suspicion that at the camp, or in its vicinity, would be found Kitty Fowler. It seemed to him unreasonable to suppose that the Indians would build a fire at such a time so far away from the lake, which was the principal attraction to them.

These hopes were not a little strengthened by the sight of some person lying near the fire. A second glance satisfied him that it was the lady for whom he was seeking.

"There, Kitty! I knew it was you! Poor Duke has been fretting and worrying, but he don't care half so much about you as I do. I have been sobbing and worrying all night long, and nothing could soothe me. I think you ought to give me a—a—kiss—don't you, my darling Kitty—"

Zadok was rushing forward with his arms outstretched, ready to embrace the figure, when it sprang to its feet, and proved to be a huge Indian warrior in all his paint and feathers! The amazed lover made a leap and a howl, such as he made when he was suddenly apprised that he was standing on a live coal of fire, and without pausing to continue the acquaintance, he turned about, and tore through the woods as if an exploding bomb were tied to his heels.

"What's the row, now?" asked Duke Barlow who was standing, rifle in hand, ready to receive a charge from the Sioux.

"Thunderation! if there ain't Injins everywhere!" exclaimed the disgusted Zadok, still panting from his severe exertions. "I'll bet, if you should climb a tree to rob an eagle's nest, you would find a red skin taking his nap there and if you stub your toe and pitch over a log, you'll smash your nose against the skull of one of 'em. I'm going to get out of such a darned country as soon as I can. If we keep on traveling toward the south we shall reach camp by night again, and I ca'c'late if I once get there,

that I'll stick. I've had 'nough sloshing through canyons, crawling into caves, turning somersets out of a balloon, and trying to hug an Indian for a pretty girl. I'm tired, I say, and let's 'light out."

All this was natural, but Duke's fear was that by attempting to do too much during the night they might complicate matters, and place themselves in a worse position than they were at present. This fear, however, was ended by the discovery that day was already breaking and they would speedily be placed in a position in which they might tramp to their hearts' content.

"Zadok," said Barlow, as they moved stealthily through the wood, "I don't suppose there is much call for your remaining in the woods. You have no weapon but your lasso, which I must say you have used with great effect and skill; you might as well start back to camp, and if you take good care of your steps, you can reach Major Mufton by night-time. I will remain behind to learn what has become of Kitty."

"I would have you understand, sir, that I have fully as much interest in that young lady as you have yourself. Indeed, I think it is more."

The self-important manner in which this was uttered, brought a smile to the face of Duke, in spite of himself, and he made haste to say:

"Oh, stay, by all means! I would not deprive you of that pleasure."

"If you will loan me your gun, you can make your way back to camp yourself, and I will guarantee to bring her in within forty-eight hours."

"If I could feel sure of that, I would gladly do it," was the reply; "but there is no assurance that you or I, or both or any one, can do it. Hello! what's that?"

All at once, and without the slightest warning, they came in sight of the balloon, from which they believed they had parted company forever. It was not in ruins, as might have been expected, but was inflated to its full extent, held to the earth by a large rope, secured around a jutting rock, loaded with a number of large stones as ballast, and above all, a man was sitting inside as if to act the part of a sentinel, and his position, with his head bowed upon his breast, showed that he had sunk into a deep slumber.

Duke Barlow could scarcely believe his eyes. It appeared more like the transformation of a fairy scene than sober fact; but there was no mistaking it; there was the expanded balloon, and there was the guardsman sound asleep.

"He's one of the white Indians," whispered our hero, catching the arm of his companion. "I believe it is Powers himself, the king of the lot."

But the natural inquiry was as to how this had been accomplished during the darkness of the night. The balloon must have been followed and watched all day, and chance had carried it close to a camp of a party of the white Indians, who had at once seized it and carried it to some place where there was a natural outflow of gas, with which they filled the silk again, and made all preparations for ascending.

Why this delay, and why this sentinel, asleep at his post?

The wandering white Indians had probably made every preparation, and then scattered in quest of Kitty, whom they knew to be somewhere in the neighborhood. To prevent any interference from intermeddling red-skins, or the two white men, whom they were so anxious to shoot, the old king-bee himself had been left in charge.

It is well known that the Upper Yellowstone region gives every indication of being of volcanic origin. Innumerable geysers and springs, which throw up hot mud, are found through an area numbering hundreds of square miles. Subterranean fires exist in various places, and there are thousands of fissures from which gases escape in suffocating copiousness. Streams have been found in which the water was at a temperature sufficient to boil fishes, so that it can be understood how, in such a country, the necessary gas could be secured, with scarcely any trouble, wherewith to inflate a balloon. It was a knowledge of that fact which had led the father of Kitty Fowler, quite a noted aeronaut, to bring the one which we have described into this territory. The gas was less bouyant than that obtained in the usual way, but the capacity of the silk was such as to take in all that was needed, and it was easy to see that in the present instance, it was expanded sufficiently to carry up a large incumbrance.

"Shall I lasso him?" asked Zadok, when they had stared long enough to comprehend the situation.

"No; it isn't exactly the thing to strangle a man unless you are compelled to do it in self-defense. You see he has his rifle leaning against his shoulder. I have a plan which I shall attempt, and which gives more promise than anything yet tried. Wait here, until I move forward and take charge of this individual."

Zadok did as requested, and Duke approached the balloon with the step of a cat when advancing upon its prey. Mr. Powers—for it was that gentleman himself—was indulging in a very comfortable morning nap, with no thought of any disturbance like that which impended, and when our hero stood beside him, his slumber was unbroken and undisturbed.

To avoid a collision, it was necessary to deprive the man of his weapon, and this was the purpose of Duke, who reached one hand over and drew out the rifle that rested idly against his knees. The man muttered and moved uneasily, but he did not awake.

Duke observed the handles of a pistol and a knife in his girdle, but he deemed that it was enough to secure the gun, and he permitted these to remain.

Turning about, he motioned to Zadok to approach, and whispered to him, as he came up:

"I'm going to make him get out, and we'll get in and make another ascension."

"That's bully," replied Brown, pleased with the prospect of another aerial ride, when he could have some daylight to assist his vision; "but let's surprise that old rooster; I'm always fond of surprising folks; I enjoy it. Give me the privilege."

"How are you going to do it?" inquired Duke,

in some astonishment, uncertain whether it was prudent to permit him to carry out his whim or not.

"I'll crawl in and take a seat opposite him; then, when you awake him, he will open his eyes, look over and see me, and feel very much surprised."

The basket of the balloon was fastened down close to the ground, so that, by stepping upon the edge of the rock, it was an easy matter to get within. Zadok did this with all the care possible, and thrusting one of his long legs within, his body quickly followed, and placing himself directly in front of the dozing white Indian, he assumed as fierce an expression as he could, and winked to Duke to signify that all was ready.

As our hero felt himself to be master of the situation, he proceeded to awake the sleeping scamp in rather a rude and insulting fashion. Reaching his hand around, he caught the long nose of Powers between his thumb and finger, and gave it a sharp tweak, then sprung back and cocked his rifle.

It proved very effective, the fellow muttering a horrible oath as he opened his eyes and leaped to his feet. As he glared around, his gaze naturally rested upon the face and figure of Zadok Brown, who was half-scowling and half-grinning. One glance was enough, and then drawing his revolver, he pointed it straight at his head, exclaiming:

"It's you come ag'in, is it? But you've come the last time! I ain't going to give you a chance to say your prayers this time."

"Oh, my Heavens!" gasped Zadok, certain his last minute had come. "I didn't pull your nose; I never thought of it even; I wouldn't do such a thing."

"Drop that pistol, or I shall send this bullet through your brain this instant."

The flaming face turned like lightning, and saw the muzzle of a cocked rifle within six feet of his forehead. It emphasized the words just spoken with such effect that the pistol dropped at once from the nerveless hand.

"Now, out of that place, so as to make room for me."

This was obeyed with the same promptness, and within the space of two minutes, the balloon was speeding upward, with the friends within, and the discomfited white Indian gazing after them.

"I think I did surprise him," said Zadok, alluding to his little ruse, "but I'll be durned if he didn't surprise me a little too, when he pointed that pistol at my nose."

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

DUKE BARLOW was not long in learning that the balloon was inflated with a gas much less buoyant than that which had borne them upward on the day before. After they had thrown out all the ballast, it rose less than fifteen hundred feet, where it drifted slowly along, giving the occupants a view which extended hundreds of miles, but warning them at the same time that it was not likely that they could remain aloft for many hours. Besides this, the peculiar gas, on account of its greater specific gravity,

occasionally whiffed in their faces, to their intense annoyance. Zadok rose to his feet and grasped the pointed mouth for the purpose of closing it, and would have strangled completely but for the intervention of Duke.

The plan of the latter may briefly be stated. Although unable to find Kitty it was certain that she was at no great distance from the scene of last night's encampment. He believed that she had been compelled to change her position to escape the Indians, who were so numerous around, and that she was still moving cautiously about, unable to signal or rejoin them, from the cause just mentioned. With her senses on the alert, she could not fail to observe the balloon floating above her. Not having any reason to suppose that her friends had taken to aerostation again, she would scrutinize the air-ship the more closely, so as to be on the alert for her foes. And then, with the aid of his glass, he hoped to gain sight of her and so make himself known, after which it seemed easy to effect a meeting.

At the same time it was to be expected that the white Indians would be equally on the alert and while seeking one party, it was all-important that he should avoid the other.

The balloon had not been aloft five minutes, when Zadok, whose eyes were bulging out with wonder at the grandeur of the view, exclaimed:

"Look! look! there is the party now!"

There they were, a half dozen men, just landed from the lake. Their two canoes could be seen resting against the bank, while they stood motionless gazing upward, no doubt totally unable to comprehend what they saw.

"I think they have my Kitty with them," wailed Zadok, the next minute. "Oh, dear, it will break my heart, but I don't see how we can help it."

Duke had already produced his glass and pointed it downward toward the group. A careful scrutiny revealed the gratifying fact that the lady was not among them. In another portion of the lake a boat was seen in which were two Indians paddling, while several others could be distinguished standing on the shore opposite.

"Now, Zadok," said he, when he had explained his mistake, "use your eyes the best you know how. We haven't any time to spend in admiring the scenery, which we might enjoy so well at another time. I have no doubt that Kitty is watching us from some secure place, and what we want to do is to find her. Look off yonder," he added, pointing to the south, "and you can see the ridge from which the balloon started night before last. Right beyond that is Major Muston's camp, and if we can reach that we are safe against all the Indians, white or red, in the Yellowstone country."

"How is the wind?" asked Zadok, with some anxiety.

"Watch the lake below, and we can soon tell."

"It's blowing south, as sure as we live! Isn't that lucky? All we have to do is to keep straight ahead for an hour or two and we shall be there."

"But I don't want to go there directly; my

object in stealing the balloon is to find Kitty. I would rather see her than a dozen camps of ours."

"So would I; but then she understands the woods better than we do. Hadn't we better leave her alone, while we hurry into camp and send out a company to bring her in? I will lead such a company, and it will be the best."

Duke shook his head and said, seriously:

"If you really loved Kitty you could not consent to leave her in peril a minute longer than you were compelled. Dismiss all such thoughts—"

"There! I think I see a gal's bonnet on the top of the hill yonder!" interrupted Brown, in such excitement that he nearly jumped out of the car. "I'll bet it's her!"

Duke lost no time in turning the glass in the direction indicated, but nothing was to be seen of the nature described, and he admonished his enthusiastic companion to be a little more careful about awakening hope only to disappoint it.

The balloon had now floated entirely clear of the lake and was floating at a moderate speed directly southward in the direction of the camp of the exploring-party. At the same time both could see that it was gradually descending and must strike the ground within an hour or two at the utmost.

"They're following us," added Zadok, a moment later, as he looked back toward the lake they were leaving behind.

This time he spoke the truth. Glimpses of the white Indians were caught as they hurried through the woods and did their utmost to keep up with the balloon, which no doubt they saw would soon come down within their reach. The men were on foot, and the rate of our friends was such in the almost still air that they had scarcely any difficulty in keeping up with them.

This continued for perhaps a mile or more, during which the white Indians fell somewhat in the background, owing more to the difficulties in traveling than to any increase in the pace of the air-ship. Still Duke felt no particular alarm until he heard the top of a tree brush against the lower part of the car, and realized how rapidly he was descending.

"By George!" he exclaimed, in an excited undertone, "we have got to make a run for it. Lucky that you have a rifle, Zadok, for you'll have to use it. This ascent is a failure and instead of finding Kitty, we are in greater danger than before."

"Here we go!" gasped Brown, as the basket fairly caught in another tree; "let off the gas. Hadn't I better climb to the top and kick a hole through?"

He was about to act upon his own suggestion when Duke prevented. The gas was already escaping at a rapid rate, and the grappling-iron held firmly; but it was impossible to get the balloon down to the ground and the two scrambled out as rapidly as possible, and went down the trunk of the tree.

They knew their enemies were close at hand, and they did not let the grass grow under their feet, but, turning their faces southward, ran as fast as if they already saw the murderous white Indians at their heels.

"Remember that we are leaving a broad

trail," admonished Duke, as his companion showed some signs of hesitating, "and it is more than likely that they can follow us as well as the Sioux themselves. I noticed a stream of water ahead of us only a short distance. We can soon make that, and have a chance to throw them off."

"All right," responded Zadok, striking ahead like a deer. "I can run when there's a necessity for it. Hello! here we are."

The next moment they paused on the edge of a brawling mountain stream, some three or four yards in width, apparently very clear, and quite deep. The current was swift, and ran several hundred yards before it dashed down the cascade, whose roar could be plainly heard from where they stood.

"If we wade down this some distance," said Duke, "of course, they will not be able to tell whether we have gone up or down-stream, and we shall have all the more chance of giving them the slip entirely."

"I'll just step in and see how deep it is—Thunder and—"

Zadok, reaching out one foot, touched bottom with it—but not until it had gone down something like ten feet below the surface. He came up furious. "I'll be darned if I believe I'm going to get dry for six months. Why didn't you tell a feller it was forty feet deep?"

"I would have done so, if I had known it but how should I know—Jove! look there! isn't that lucky? It looks as if that canoe were left there for us!"

As he spoke, he caught hold of one of those delicate structures for which the Northwestern Indians are famed. It was resting on the bank, partly in and partly out of the water.

"It ain't so very lucky for me," said Zadok, drawing his bedraggled self out of the water. "But if it will hold us both, I may as well take a ride with you. Where's the paddle?"

None was to be seen, and none was particularly needed, as the current was so rapid. They were carried swiftly downward, until the cascades were reached, when they made a "portage" or carry around them, and then embarked again. This was continued for several hours, during which they accomplished fully ten miles; and, as nothing had been seen or heard of the Indians during all that time, they were quite sanguine of having escaped them altogether.

During these manipulations, Zadok managed to grasp a splendid fish in his hand. It weighed fully three pounds, and, as he insisted so hard upon stopping to cook it, Duke consented.

They moved very carefully over the rocks and stones, leaving as little trail as possible, until they reached a nook, seemingly secure, where a small fire was kindled, and the plump, appetizing fish was speedily broiled. It made them a delicious dinner, indeed, after which they laid down to rest awhile before pursuing their journey.

The sultry afternoon, their fatigue and long deprivation of sleep, caused both to sink into a slumber which continued unbroken into the night.

When Duke Barlow opened his eyes, all was dark around him. The moon was shining in a

clear sky, but it scarcely penetrated the gloom wherein they had taken refuge. He rose to his feet, and was about waking his comrade, when he was thrilled by the faint, soft tones of music that came floating through the still night air.

It was the same voice that so enraptured and enthralled him a few nights before, and he fairly held his breath in delightful suspense.

"Can it be? Yes; it is the same; it is Kitty; I will go to her."

He started forward, forgetful of his slumbering companion, but paused ere he had taken a dozen steps—for he found that she (if it was she) was approaching him!

Nearer and still nearer, until, through the misty light, the dim outlines of a well-known figure were seen.

"Kitty, my own darling—my dearest! Thank Heaven—thank Heaven!"

And the beautiful loving girl was folded in his arms and pressed to his heart, her delight scarcely less than his.

And when the agitation of both had quieted somewhat, she told how she had been compelled to leave their encampment, the night before, on account of the approach of Indians, and she was making her way gradually southward on this day when she discovered the balloon, but did not suspect who the occupants were until they had descended among the tree-tops, at which time she was about half a mile distant. She was again prevented from rejoining them by the proximity of so many savages, and she had been on the hunt for hours. At nightfall, yielding to the whim that sometimes came over her, she began singing in a low tone to herself, and by this means the two came together again.

Zadok was awakened, and as it was deemed that the opportunity was a good one, they made all haste southward. He made many attempts to play the tender and sentimental lover toward her, but after a time he concluded the whole thing was a failure, and he remained sulky for the rest of the journey.

Major Mufton's camp was reached shortly after daybreak, without once exchanging a shot with or seeing their enemies. Some of the exploring-party, upon hearing the story of Kitty Fowler, made a visit in force to the diamond cavern. A furious fight was had with the white Indians, during which Powers and two others were killed, and several badly wounded; but the transparent pebbles were secured and brought away. Upon examination, they proved to be nothing more than pebbles, and hence were as worthless as the other "diamonds" which were recently found in various portions of the West.

But Duke Barlow maintains to this day that he found a diamond—a perfect gem among gems—and her name once was Kitty Fowler.

THE END.

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